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Post ^{Việt}Đổi Vietnamese Art After 1990 Mới

12 May
2008
TO
28 Sept
2008

This catalogue is published by the Singapore Art Museum for the exhibition *Post-Doi Moi: Vietnamese Art after 1990* which is held to celebrate the 35 years of diplomatic ties between Singapore and Vietnam. The exhibition is part of *Vietnam Festival*, an integrated programme of the National Heritage Board.

Exhibition dates: 12 May to 28 September 2008

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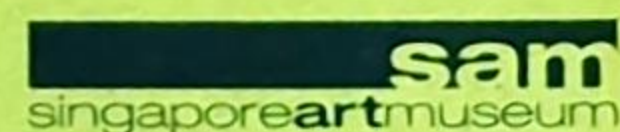
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Post ^{Việt Nam}Đổi Mới Vietnamese Art After 1990

**12 May, 2008
TO 28 Sept, 2008**

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- The Fine Arts Association, Vietnam
- The Ford Foundation, Vietnam

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- Nguyen Quang Huy
- Phan Thi Thao Nguyen
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BUI CIE
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DANG MINH TRI
DINH THI THANH POONG
DO THI HINH
DO DUY TUAN
DO KY HUY
DO SON
DO THI NINH
HA MINH THANH
HA TRI HUU
HO HUU THU
HOANG DUONG CAM
HUA THANH BINH
LE HONG THAI
LE QUANG HA
LE THANH SON
LE THIET CUONG
NGUYEN BACH DAN

NGUYEN MINH THANH
NGUYEN MINH CUONG
NGUYEN MINH T
NGUYEN THANH
NGUYEN THANH SON
NGUYEN THE CUONG CUONG
NGUYEN TRIUNG
NGUYEN XUAN TIEP
PHAM AN HUU
PHAM HUU THONG
PHAM LUONG
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FOREWORD

Kwok Kian Chow
Director,
Singapore Art Museum

Whereas the term "*Post-Doi Moi*" refers to the period in the aftermath of open-market reforms in Vietnam, Singapore Art Museum's engagement with Vietnamese modern art may also be said to be "*post-Doi Moi*" in that it was in the early 1990s when we became keenly interested in researching and collecting Vietnamese art. Since then, we have been a keen observer and at times participant in the developments in art historical research, collecting, art institution and art market in Vietnam. Although the transition from a socialist to an open market economy was not a common occurrence in Southeast Asian countries, there were common patterns of modernisation in art and international engagements among the Southeast Asian countries. There were similarities in responses to international modern art and art events, foreign cultural institutions, overseas education and the emergence of regional art discourse.

Given our museum's specialisation in the region, Vietnamese art serves as a window, not only for us to attempt an in-depth understanding of the country but also the region's art history through comparative studies. Focusing on modern art alone is however inadequate as the story of modern art is also one of drawing inspirations from, if not dealing with tensions with, traditional cultures. The *Post-Doi Moi* exhibition is organised as part of the National Heritage Board's Vietnam Festival whereby various aspects of Vietnamese culture, from ancient civilization to contemporary society, are presented by the national museums. These programmes collectively mark our modest attempts to present Vietnam in a comprehensive manner and to celebrate our 35 years of diplomatic relations.

The *Post-Doi Moi* exhibition also entails an international conference on modern and contemporary Vietnamese art, a performance art workshop and presentation, along with two other publications – the conference proceedings and a documentation of the workshop. For these events, we received tremendous support from both Vietnamese and international experts, and more importantly, by Vietnamese artists who generously shared their creative talent and artistic outputs, as well as their concerns and anxieties. Being acutely aware of the distance – both cultural and geographical between Singapore and Vietnam – we can only declare our earnest intention and passionate interest in Vietnamese art and culture, and this distance itself can perhaps generate indirect but productive perspective on Vietnamese modern art. This will, in turn, enrich our understanding of the Southeast Asian region.

There are many people we wish to thank for their help and support in this exhibition project, and I would like to highlight in particular, Nora Taylor, Boitran Huynh-Beattie and Tran Luong who have worked together with my colleague Joyce Fan and the SAM team to realise the exhibition, conference and workshop. I would also like to thank all the artists, collectors, critics, gallerists and writers who form the make-up of the Vietnamese modern art culture, for their kind assistance in helping us in our celebration of Vietnam. And we look forward to their continuing support for our work in the country.

CURATORIAL REPORT

AFTER DOI MOI, WHAT'S NEXT?

Joyce Fan
Curator,
Singapore Art Museum

Post-Đổi Mới Vietnamese Art After 1990

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When the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) was tasked to organise an exhibition on Vietnamese art as part of the NHB (National Heritage Board) Vietnam festival¹ in celebration of our 35 years of diplomatic ties, the first question we asked was what should the display of works focus on? We wish to take into consideration that our Museum's involvement with the Vietnamese art scene has a brief history that started in 1994 with the first purchases of paintings, and that the art scene in Vietnam has since taken on a pluralistic character with experimental forms of expression in installation, performance art, film and video. As for art exhibitions that SAM was involved in to-date, the Museum's inaugural in 1996 included a survey of Vietnamese modern art until the mid-1990s within its review on Southeast Asian art, and paintings by Modern masters such as To Ngoc Van, Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Sang were borrowed from Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts Hanoi to supplement the recent purchases.

Besides the inaugural exhibition, SAM together with ACM (Asian Civilisations Museum) mounted an exhibition *Viewing Vietnam* in the MITA (Ministry of Information and the Arts, now MICA, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts) Building from 21 July to 15 August 2003 where important paintings from the Revolutionary period (1945 to 1975) were featured². Hence with the present task at hand, we decided to continue the story that has been told so far, that is to examine the developments in the Vietnamese art scene since the implementation of *Doi Moi* ("renovation") up until the present. This will help us gain a further understanding of the current trends that we observed, asking the question, "After *Doi Moi*, what's next?"

Examining the trends in the post-*Doi Moi* period is challenging, and we sought the advice of two Vietnamese art historians, Professor Nora Taylor³ and Dr Boitran Huynh-Beattie⁴ with our intention to put together an exhibition to highlight the recent developments. We met in Singapore and Vietnam to discuss on the curatorial direction of the exhibition and to highlight artists whose works exemplified the developments that have taken place. We also discussed the





Gallery view of the section "Transformation" in the exhibition.

symposium outline that was designed to complement the exhibition where the presentations could possibly fill in the gaps that the exhibition could not address. With a framework for an exhibition, we went about finalising the themes and works for the display as well as the speakers we would like to invite to the symposium. We further supplemented the exhibition with a programme on performance art, with the desire to include an exchange between

Vietnam and Singapore young artists as well as documenting the process to gain an understanding into the medium of performance art. It took shape in the form of a 10-day closed-door workshop that culminated in a three-day performance event. Working together with Vietnamese artist Tran Luong⁵ and Singapore artists Lee Wen and Jason Lim⁶ as curator-moderators and participating artists, we selected five Vietnamese artists and five Singaporean artists for the project. (See page 164 for the report on *Ket Noi: Singapore-Vietnam Exchange*. The exhibition and symposium together with the performance art event are meant therefore to be a complementary whole in SAM's proposal on the investigation into the Vietnamese art practices after the implementation of the *Doi Moi* campaign⁷.

Development of the market for Vietnamese Art

In an effort to re-vitalise the depressed economy, the Vietnamese government implemented the *Doi Moi* campaign in 1986. Reform policies were put in place to transform the existing subsidy system into an open-market economy. The impact of the campaign on the developments in art where private enterprises

Economic Development and Five-Year Plans of Vietnam

Economic planning in Vietnam under the communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam and later the Socialist Republic of Vietnam takes the form as Five-Year Plans that introduce economic development initiatives. The first Five-Year Plan was implemented for the period 1960 to 1965 and was only applicable to North Vietnam as South Vietnam also known as Republic of Vietnam that existed from 1955 to 1975, was under the influence of the United States.

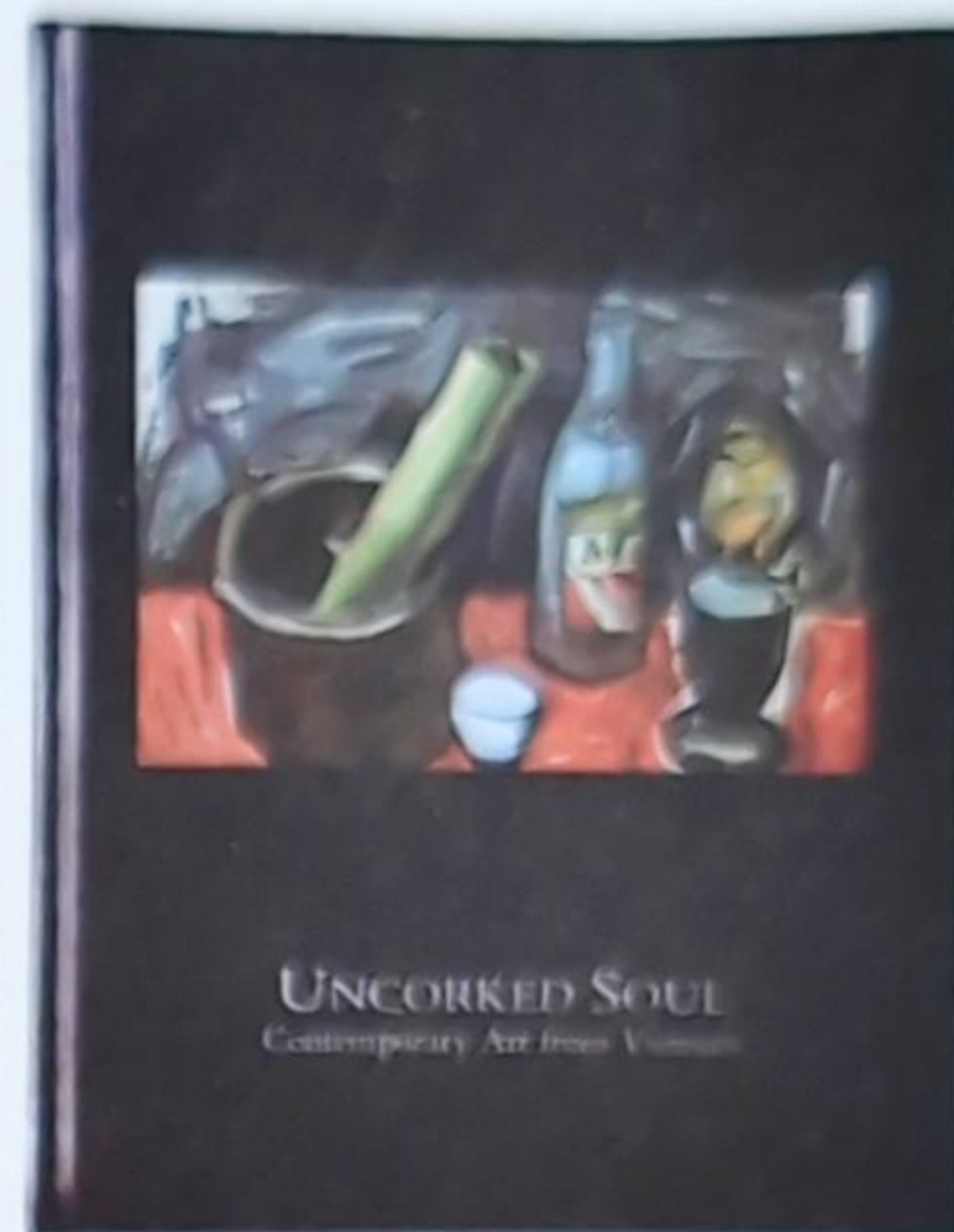
Soon after the Fall of Saigon in 1975 and the subsequent re-unification of the north and south, the second Five-Year Plan was introduced in the newly formed Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The second Five-Year Plan between 1976 and 1980 was the start of the socialist industrialisation phase that was to last until 2005 in the effort to integrate both the north and the south under communism and to stimulate economic growth. The economic goals set were ambitious and were unattainable given the circumstances at that time. Furthermore, the US embargo as well as the wars at the China border and in Cambodia inflicted further blows to the Vietnamese economy. Between 1981 and 1985, the third Five-year Plan with more conservative goals was to address the shortfalls in productivity and food supplies, and unemployment. For the first time, free enterprise was permitted in the agricultural sector that began the reversal process of nationalisation. Despite the continued move to reduce the capitalist sector in the south, the decision to combine both central planning and free-market incentives was put in place towards the close of this period. This eventually led to the fourth Five-Year Plan (1986 to 1990) that saw the implementation of the *Doi Moi* campaign where the objective was to create a "socialist-orientated market economy". The reforms implemented brought an end to agricultural collectives, removal of price controls and allowed the establishment of private enterprises and foreign investments. [JF]

were permitted was very positive. It allowed for the blossoming of the art market where previously, restrictions and controls put in place by the State confined public displays of art to the exhibitions permitted at the Vietnamese Fine Arts Association.

Although it is observed that by the late 1970s the State started loosening its control over the production of art, and there was greater freedom in artistic expressions and a rise in experimentation under the concept of national renewal in the 1980s, the first private gallery – Salon Natasha – only opened in 1990 in Hanoi⁸. Natalia Kraevskaia, who established the gallery arrived in the city seven years earlier in 1983 to work in the Pushkin Institute. She recalls the restriction imposed that minimised contacts between the locals and foreigners, and that despite the situation, Bui Xuan Phai received foreign guests in his home.⁹ She remembers fondly her visits to his house and studio where he made several quick sketches of her and her husband, self-taught artist Vu Dan Tan¹⁰. With a keen interest in art and wanting to support the emerging contemporary art scene, she started Salon Natasha and featured works by young and experimental artists.

Salon Natasha which occupied the front of her home and also functioned as Tan's studio however ceased to function in 2005 with Kraevskaia now commuting between Hanoi and Moscow where she has a teaching position in one of its universities.

The Vietnamese art market developed at an incredible rate during the early 1990s with private galleries being established in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City¹¹. For a long time, there was only one state-run art gallery that was established in 1965¹² but by 1994, it was reported that approximately 60 galleries were functioning in each of the two cities. The motivation was of course the demand for art with a majority of the buyers being foreigners.¹³ An important development, perhaps even the deciding factor that brought Vietnamese art to the attention of the art world outside of Vietnam, was the 1991 staging of an exhibition of Vietnamese art in Hong Kong, entitled *Uncorked Soul*. It was the first overseas exhibition of Vietnamese art in a non-Communist country since 1975. The exhibition was put together by owner and director Stephen McGuiness of Plum Blossom Gallery, a commercial art gallery based in Hong Kong. *Uncorked Soul* featured the paintings of 15 artists¹⁴ who have now become household names in Vietnamese art. Prior to this exhibition, these artists were completely unknown outside of Vietnam but over the years, works by artists such as Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Tu Nghiem have regularly appeared in both Christie's and Sotheby's auctions of Southeast Asian art, and artists like Dang Xuan Hoa and Nguyen Trung are much sought after by private collectors. The accompanying catalogue with essays by Jeffrey Hantover and Nguyen Quan,



Front cover of the exhibition catalogue *Uncorked Soul: Contemporary Art from Vietnam*.

Vietnam Fine Arts Association

The Vietnam Fine Arts Association was formed in 1957 in Hanoi under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and a branch was founded in Ho Chi Minh City after the re-unification of Vietnam in 1976. The Association's main role was to provide a system of support to an artist by taking responsibility to promote its member artists through national exhibitions, awards and publications as well as giving stipends to State artists. Although membership was not a requirement for becoming an artist, it was the only outlet through which art works might be displayed and sold to the main patron, the State. Prior to *Doi Moi*, artists were not allowed to openly sell their art and art galleries were virtually non-existent. The Association has since stopped providing subsistence to States artists and even though many continue with their membership, it is now no longer pertinent for artists to be registered with the Association. [JF]



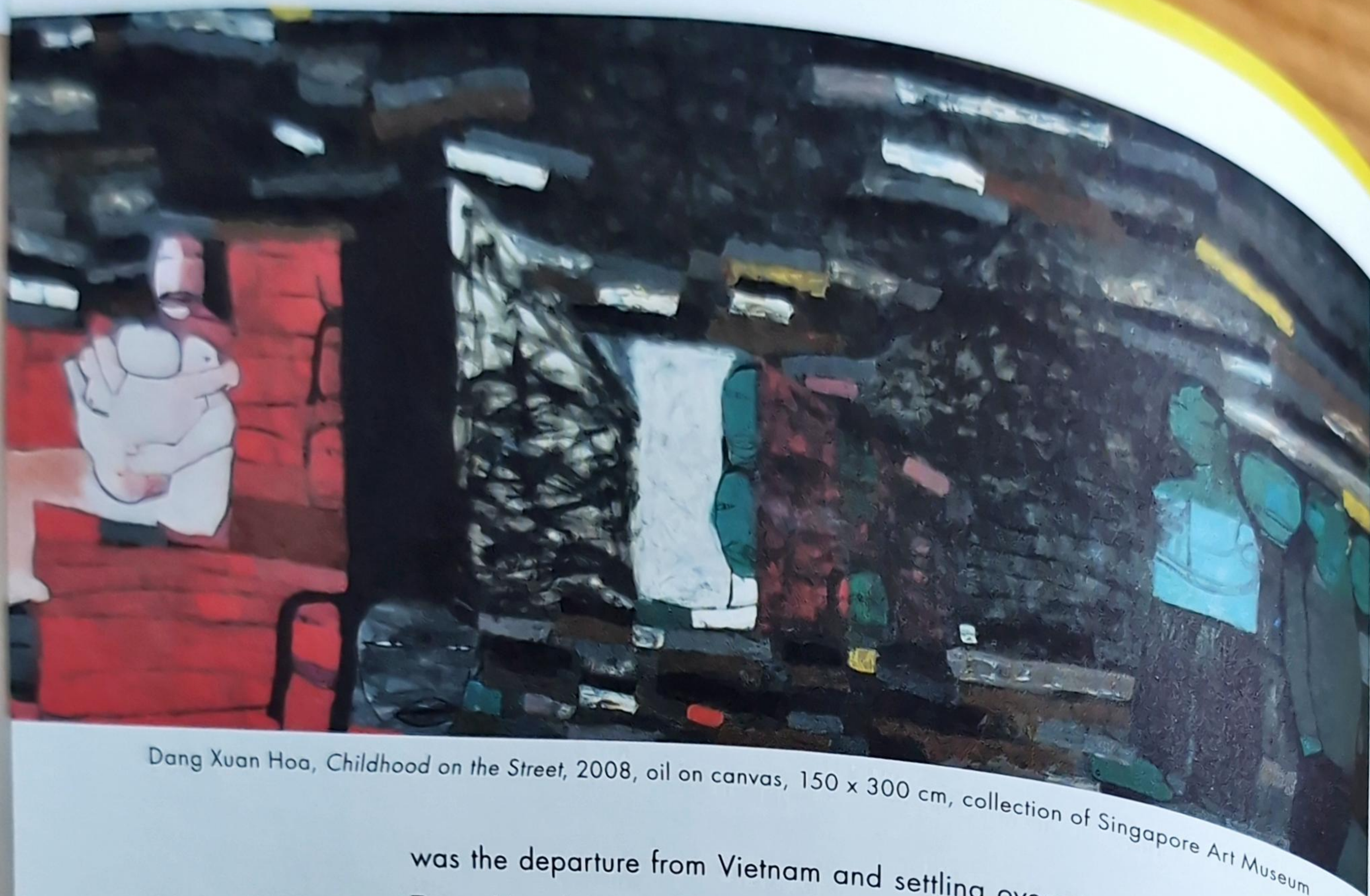
View of the display *Tribute to Bui Xuan Phai* at the Singapore Art Museum that commemorated the 20th anniversary of the artist's death.

being the first ever comprehensive publication with scholarly text in English, became the buying guide for the next few years that resulted in buyers and dealers seeking out these artists.¹⁵

The growth of the art market could not be sustained throughout the years and began slowing down in the mid-1990s. At this time, Hoa who was the first Vietnamese artist to embark on an artist residency in United States¹⁶ had just returned to Hanoi. Feeling the anxiety of being an artist then at an international level, he revealed how the pressure to produce paintings to satisfy the demand for his work had in fact hindered him from painting as he feared that with one wrong move, the momentum would be broken. However, Hoa eventually decided that he would accept the market's interest in his paintings and make bolder statements with his art.¹⁷ He has continued to be a highly successful artist in Vietnam today as evident by the phenomenal price he commanded in a recent art auction in Singapore.¹⁸ Tran Luong, another artist in the Hanoi Gang of Five



considered to have the “most distinct, sustained vision” among the five artists¹⁹, also had the opportunity to experience life in the United States, spending several months in New York City in a residency in 1996. The experience however left him to re-consider seriously his own practices. After returning to Hanoi and seeing how things were developing within the art market in the later half of the 1990s, he chose instead not to exhibit in galleries and eventually stopped painting altogether in order “to avoid the kinds of mistakes [he] sees [his] colleagues are making.” Choosing not to exhibit in galleries was tantamount to career-suicide as it was the outlet in sustaining an art career. However, it was also during this period that Luong ventured into the field of installation and performance art, preferring the independence that such a practice could offer. It was this independence and refusal to be commercial that brought him to the attention of art museums and organisations that welcomed non-commercialised art practices. Since then, Luong has travelled extensively and participated in international workshops and exchanges as well as obtaining support from foreign funding agencies for his curatorial projects. Another response by artists to the pressures of the art market



Dang Xuan Hoa, *Childhood on the Street*, 2008, oil on canvas, 150 x 300 cm, collection of Singapore Art Museum

was the departure from Vietnam and settling overseas. One such artist is Tran Trong Vu who was featured in *Uncorked Soul*. Vu who studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1989 to 1992 left Hanoi to settle in France permanently. Currently based in Paris, Vu is still represented by Plum Blossoms Gallery in Hong Kong, and has ventured into installation art, exhibiting in Europe and the United States.

By the late 1990s, the criticisms levied on the Vietnamese art scene were pointing towards the commercial formula that artists seemed to have come to rely on – producing numerous canvas either on women in flowing Ao Dai (Vietnamese traditional wear for women) or idyllic countryside scenes and romantic cityscapes of Hanoi. Galleries and artists realised that in order to survive, they had to re-think their strategies, and as observed by artist Anh Khanh: “Better artists are developing while I see a lot of very commercial artists will disappear. Now there are 100 galleries, many selling only souvenir paintings. Artists have to be careful to move in the right direction. They have to choose carefully the places they exhibit... You can’t sell paintings like clothes.”²⁰

Hanoi Gang of Five

The Hanoi Gang of Five, the first group of young artists to gain international renown, is a title coined by art critic and writer Duong Tuong for artists Dang Xuan Hoa, Ha Tri Hieu, Tran Luong, Pham Quang Vinh and Hong Viet Dung. Hoa, Hieu and Dung were childhood friends who met while taking art lessons from pioneer artist Pham Viet Song. While studying in the university, they became acquainted with Luong and Vinh. In the period following their graduation in the mid-1980s, there was very little opportunity for young artists to exhibit as art exhibitions were then held in the Fine Arts Association exhibition hall or government-owned art galleries. They decided to get together and hold monthly exhibitions in each other's homes. Eventually when *Doi Moi* was implemented and private art galleries began emerging, the Gang of Five began holding exhibitions in Mai Gallery that was started by Tuong's daughter. Although each artist had a different style, as remarked by Dung, simplicity in representation and interest in the rustic rural life were common among them. With each of them strongly driven in advancing their artistic practice, they have since gained fame and reputation in the Hanoi art community. Hoa who is the best known of the group, embarked on a six-month residency programme in 1994 under the Indochina Arts Partnership directed by veteran artist C David Thomas (1946, Portland, USA) - his first exposure to life overseas. Subsequently, Luong whom most considered to possess a distinct

and sustained vision, also spent some time in New York City in 1996 where he was exposed to contemporary art practices. Hoa, Hieu and Dung continue to paint prolifically, while Luong is now more engaged in the contemporary media of installation and performance as well as in curating art events. Vinh is currently the director of the Kim Dong Publishing House, the largest book publisher in Vietnam. [JF]



(From left to right) front row Pham Quang Vinh, Hong Viet Dung, Ha Tri Hieu
back row Dang Xuan Hoa, Tran Luong

Greater Freedom of Expression and Experimentation

After the launch of the *Doi Moi* campaign, artists were increasingly given greater freedom of expression. However though it is observed that more experimental works began emerging publicly from the late 1980s onwards, much caution was exercised by artists, galleries and funding entities in an atmosphere of uncertainty. To a certain extent only, the establishment of an open market created an outlet for creative expressions and a means for artists to sell their works other than to the State. As mentioned earlier, the influential position that the Vietnam Fine Arts Association once had over the production of art was weakening with the economic reforms initiated after the reunification of Vietnam. It is important somewhat to take note of the impact of the reunification and be mindful of the government's objective in the integration of the north and south. Artists from Hanoi could, come into contact for the first time after two decades, with their counterparts in Ho Chi Minh City. This meeting or re-acquaintance for some, like Bui Xuan Phai²¹, had a profound impact on the development of art where many Northern artists had little opportunity to view different art forms other than what they could see in Hanoi and the permitted socialist realist art.²² The south, having been under the governance of the United States until 1975, had a thriving art scene where exhibitions of both local and foreign artists were held and where artists could access international art trends from printed materials and media.²³ During the 1960s and into the 1970s, artists in Saigon (now, Ho Chi Minh City) were then experimenting in Abstraction as well with other contemporary expressions²⁴, and it was possible that artist Bui Xuan Phai could have been inspired to produce a series of abstract paintings during or after his trip to the South²⁵. The interest in Abstraction continued into the 1980s with artists producing experimental works in this genre. It was also not surprising that as a result a great number of abstract and semi-abstract paintings were offered for sale in art galleries during the early 1990s.²⁶

After the failure of the second Five-Year plan to meet the ambitious goals set for industrialisation and agricultural output, Vietnam entered the 1980s with the concept of national renewal. A more conservative Five-Year plan was adopted and in the bid to improve agricultural output, free enterprise was permitted for the agricultural sector – a beginning of the reversal process of nationalisation that took effect since the founding of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Such



View of installation *Viva la Politica* by Tran Trong Vu at *Biennale Austria* in 2006.

a move was to eventually ease the country into a socialist-orientated market economy with private enterprises and foreign investment greatly encouraged under the Doi Moi campaign of 1986. It was under such circumstances, where the country was opening up politically and economically, that art historian and critic Nguyen Quan was to play an influential role in stimulating the art scene in Hanoi. Arts Association, and more importantly as the Chief Editor of the Association's magazine, *My Thuat* (Fine Arts). Together with art historian Thai Ba Van and his former students, Quan revamped the contents of the magazine where readers were now introduced to international artists and art trends. He also turned the magazine into a forum for the discussion and exchanges on art, thus making it an effective tool in disseminating such information to Vietnamese artists who were members of the Association. Besides writing for *My Thuat*, Quan also wrote several publications and essays on art, aesthetics and philosophy that were fundamental to the artistic developments taking place during the decade, especially during a period where there was much anxiety and and in the bid to improve agricultural output, free enterprise was permitted for the agricultural sector – a beginning of the reversal process of nationalisation that took effect since the founding of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Such a move was to eventually ease the country into a socialist-orientated market economy with private enterprises and foreign investment greatly encouraged under the *Doi Moi* campaign of 1986. It was under such circumstances, where

Abstraction in Vietnamese Art

The first encounters with Western art, specifically with oil painting, in Vietnam was likely to have taken place at the turn of the 20th century when Le Van Mien (1873-1943), who schooled at L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris, returned to Hanoi in 1895. However, there was no record that he taught or trained anyone in painting although there was a mention of a school being established for the training of craftsmen in Bien Hoa in 1903 and the other, in Gia Dinh in the south in 1913¹. A formal education in academic paintings and the Paris School took place only after the establishment of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in 1925. The pioneering group of students were schooled in the tradition of Realism, but more importantly, they were taught as artists and not trained as artisans. They were encouraged to explore and experiment different approaches and styles in painting as well as to be mindful of Vietnam's traditions in art. They were also given firm foundations in both studio practice and *plein-air* painting techniques.²

The enthusiasm for exploration and experimentation remained with the generations of artists, long after the closure of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in 1945. The first ventures beyond the confines of Realism were probably made in Cubism where the fragmentation and re-assembling of forms offer another approach in representation. Ta Ty (1921-2004) who remained in Hanoi instead of joining his friends and fellow artists in the resistance against the French, held his first Cubist painting in 1951.³ With the defeat of the French forces at Bien Dien Phu, Ta Ty moved from Hanoi to the south, settling in Saigon (now, Ho Chi Minh City) in 1954.⁴ With South Vietnam under the control of the United States, artists living in Saigon were able to access art books, journals and magazines⁵, and to view Western art in foreign art exhibitions, such as the 1962 International art exhibition⁶, that exposed them to international art trends such as surrealism, abstraction and abstract expressionism⁷. It was the

latter art styles that Ta Ty moved towards in 1960s and produced large pure abstract canvases into the 1970s. It is also important to note that abstraction was then deemed as a "new artistic expression" in the move towards modernity⁸ or perhaps, more on the urgency to update what was considered to be "traditional" vis-à-vis the influx of information regarding developments made in the West. Another notable artist, peer to Ta Ty, that experimented with this genre is Nguyen Gia Tri who produced a number of abstract works in the lacquer medium. Teaching at the Gia Dinh College of Fine Arts⁹ (now, Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts), he encouraged his students to experiment in abstraction on both canvas and lacquer, the latter could be seen as the desire for retaining a perceived heritage and in reinforcing a sense of cultural identity. For artists Ho Huu Thu and Nguyen Lam who were members of The Saigon Society of Young Artists (Hoi Hao Si Tre Saigon), lacquer became a medium for their experimentation in non-figurative works under Tri's tutelage, and they succeeded in advancing the genre with further creation of colours and surface textures. Bui Xuan Phai is also known to have painted a series of abstract paintings based on the aerial perspectives of the city, probably stemming from his interest in Cubism in the early 1950s and his further encounters with abstract and Western art during his trip to Saigon after the Reunification. These undated works were kept out of public view until after his demise in 1988.

With the implementation of state control over the type of art being produced implemented in North Vietnam, paintings from the 1950s onwards were kept within the confines of socialist realism. Other pictorial idioms such as Cubism, surrealism and abstraction were not tolerated, and artists whose sole patron was the State were told what and how to paint. There was also very little information coming into the Democratic Republic¹⁰ and hence for the artists in the north, their contacts with

their counterparts in the south following the Re-Unification was especially momentous.¹¹ This led to another phase in experimentation the 1980s¹² and early 1990s when state control was noticeably loosening. Another important source of transmission is the returning scholars from Eastern Bloc countries who were able to study important paintings found in museums of the cities they studied in and visited. Hue artist Truong Be became interested in abstraction after seeing Western art books in the library of the Hanoi College of Fine Arts (now, Hanoi University of Fine Arts) when he was studying there¹³. Therefore he maximised the opportunity to learn more about abstraction when he was studying in Budapest, Hungary in the 1980s (see his biography) and developed his style on lacquer as well as oil. Younger artist like Nguyen Trung who is highly regarded for his abstract paintings revealed that his early experimentations were disappointing, lacking depth and understanding. It was only following his 1990 trip to Paris, a life-long desire that he succeeded in moving away from figurative paintings. His abstract paintings were inspired by old decaying buildings of which he regards as past life and tradition. He has come to influence a new generation of artists who paint in the abstract mode such as Tran Van Thao whom he once shared studio space with. Other notable artists who are peers that adopted the abstract expressionist approach are Do Minh Tam and Pham An Hai.

It was not surprising that in the immediate post-*Doi Moi* period in the early 1990s, a number of abstract paintings could be found in the art market. They were a result of the experimentation in the last decade. There was also a distinct division where artists in the South were painting mostly in the abstract while in the North, artists tend to favour figurative and narrative works. The distinction disappeared by the mid-1990s with artists practising abstraction in both regions as well as in the central. (JF&PL)

- 1 Ushiroshoji, Masahiro, "Introductory Chapter: Beginning of the Modern Age/ Before 1925" in *50 Years of Modern Vietnamese Paintings 1925-75*, Japan: The Sankei Shimbun, 2005, p.183.
- 2 See Quang, Phong, "1925-1945: The Fine Arts College of Indochina and the epoch of painting prior to the Revolution" in *Vietnamese Contemporary Art*, Hanoi: The Fine Arts Publishers, undated, pp.246-51.
- 3 Ta Ty continued to exhibition in Saigon and held solo exhibitions in 1956, 1961, 1966 and 1971. Due to the Fall of Saigon in 1975, he was not able to hold his exhibition that year.
- 4 Ta Ty eventually left Vietnam for the United States via Malaysia in the 1975 after the fall of Saigon. He returned to Vietnam in 2003 and died a year later in Ho Chi Minh City. For further reading on the impact and reception of Cubism in Vietnam and Asia, see exhibition catalogue *Cubism in Asia: Unbounded Dialogues*, Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2003 (English/Chinese version). The catalogue is also published in Japanese and Korean.
- 5 See Huynh-Beattie, Boitran, "Visual Arts of the Republic of Viet-Nam (The South) 1954-1975: The "Other"" in *Vietnamese Aesthetics from 1925 Onwards*, phd dissertation, Sydney: The University of the Arts, 2005, pp. 197-99.
- 6 For more details regarding the exhibition, see *ibid*, pp. 249-54.
- 7 *Ibid*, pp.190, 199, 224.
- 8 Modernity in Southeast Asia is explored in many theses and books such as the anthology *Tradition and Change*, ed. Caroline Turner, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993, *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*, ed. TK Sabapathy, Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996 and *Traditions and Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, various authors, New York: Asia Society, 1996.
- 9 It is interesting to note that Le Van De who was the founding director of Gia Dinh College of Fine Arts revealed his impassiveness towards abstract art and his preference for figurative art in an interview published in the magazine *Bach Khoa*, n 144, p.86.
- 10 The 1954 Geneva Accord partitioned Vietnam at the 17th parallel into the Republic of Vietnam in the South and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North. The former is backed by the United States and its allies while the latter, Communist-bloc countries.
- 11 Taylor, Nora, "1975-1995: Looking Outward (and Inward) Against the State" in *The Artist and the State: The Politics of Painting and National Identity in Hanoi, Vietnam 1925-1995*, phd dissertation, Cornell University, 1997, p.187.
- 12 Findlay, Ian, "Discovery and Innovation" in *Asian Art News*, March-April 1997, p.44.
- 13 In conversation with author in January 2008.

the country was opening up politically and economically, that art historian and critic Nguyen Quan was to play an influential role in stimulating the art scene in Hanoi. As the son of an army general, Quan was one of the privileged few who were given the opportunity to study abroad. He was with the University of Merseburg, East Germany from 1965 and 1971, majoring in mathematics and physics. Having an interest in art from an early age, he took advantage of the occasion to study the masterpieces found in the Eastern European museums and trained himself in art history. When the Hanoi University of Fine Arts started the



Nguyen Quan, *Figurative Composition*, 1992, oil on canvas, 67 x 82 cm, collection of artist.

department of art theory and art history in 1978, he accepted the invitation to teach there and remained as a lecturer until his removal from office in 1989. From 1985 for four years, he was active as the secretary of the Vietnam Fine Arts Association, and more importantly as the Chief Editor of the Association's magazine, *My Thuat* (Fine Arts). Together with art historian Thai Ba Van²⁷ and his former students, Quan revamped the contents of the magazine where readers were now introduced to international artists and art trends. He also turned the magazine into a forum for the discussion and exchanges on art, thus making it an effective tool in disseminating such information to Vietnamese artists who

were members of the Association.²⁸ Besides writing for *My Thuat*, Quan also wrote several publications and essays on art, aesthetics and philosophy that were fundamental to the artistic developments taking place during the decade,²⁹ especially during a period where there was much anxiety and uncertainty with regards to the extent given to the freedom of expression. Quan was also crucial in organising a highly significant event that can be regarded as a watershed in Vietnamese art history – a workshop in Dai Lai, north of Hanoi, in 1986 where he brought together 30 artists and without a set programme, offered the participants the freedom to decide what they wanted to do with the time they had. This was indeed a luxury and in a way, a newfound freedom where Vietnamese artists did not have the privilege to enjoy. The participants, old and young alike, ate, slept and worked together for three weeks, and painted whatever and whenever they wanted. Although the workshop was not radical by today's standard,³⁰ it was nevertheless an important event as "the retreat not only promoted individual expression and art for art's sake, it also went against what the state had instituted over the past three decades in that it allowed for artists to explore their individuality rather than represent that collective sentiments of their community."³¹ No doubt, the workshop had a profound impact on the art scene where it once again revived the debates between "art for art's sake" and "art for society" that had assailed the Vietnamese art community in the 1930s and again in the late 1950s. It also placed less emphasis on the need for significant works to be produced during the workshop, but rather more clearly, gave the artists a taste of freedom and signalled changing times. However, Quan's activities did not go down well with the Cultural authorities as he was removed

Sculpture

Traditionally, sculpture in Vietnam served a strictly utilitarian or religious function. Despite the establishment of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in the first half of the 20th century, sculpture development in Vietnam remained lacklustre, with few students choosing to major in this art form. The late academic style they inherited from their European teachers and the absence of a strong sense of national identity resulted in works that lacked vigour and originality. It was only in the 1970s onwards that the second generation of Vietnamese sculptors made a concerted effort to evolve a unique expressive language that would simultaneously acknowledge their rich heritage as well as developments in the Western art world, as exemplified by the works of sculptors such as Henry Moore, Constantin Brancusi and Alberto Giacometti. [TSL]

Lacquer Painting

Previously thought more as a craft rather than fine art, lacquer is traditionally used as a protective top layer for wooden objects due to its waterproofing quality. In traditional lacquer, it is applied to religious statuary, ritual paraphernalia and architectural fixtures. The range of colours were then restricted, however with the ingenuity of pioneer Vietnamese artist Nguyen Gia Tri, together with Tran Van Can and Pham Hau, the lacquer medium is now capable to handle both modern and contemporary expressions with a wider range of colours and surface textures. Tri, a student at L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine was nevertheless worked tirelessly in this genre and is deemed to be the first artist to succeed in creating a large body of fine art paintings in lacquer. Few could rival the versatility of the "Father of Lacquer Painting" since.

The transformation of the lacquer medium first took place at the Ecole. It came to the attention of Joseph Inguimberty (1896, Marseille, France – 1971, Menton, France), the French artist who taught together with Victor Tardieu. Shortly after his arrival in Hanoi, he visited the famed Temple of Literature with Nam Son (who was schooled at Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Paris later taught at the Ecole) where he became fascinated by the lacquered cultural objects as well as the architecture fixtures found within. He began experimenting with lacquer and came to the conclusion that only the Vietnamese could truly have the expertise in making lacquer objects, along the same line of reasoning that oil painting is a privilege of the Europeans. He strongly encouraged his Vietnamese students to work with lacquer and to adopt it as a fine art medium in painting where the application of perspective in the visual depiction of reality found within the European art history was incorporated into the imagery.

The technique used in Vietnamese lacquer painting is complex and as the pumice stone is used in the polishing, it has come to be known as pumice lacquer. The resin used is from the *rhus succedanea* or *son* tree and hence lacquer painting is known as *son mai*. It is a highly toxic substance and is applied in numerous layers to a wooden support with each application taking place only after the previous layer is dried. Polishing takes place after each layer to reveal the colour and texture beneath. In this delicate task, the expertise of the maker is revealed where the desired colours and effects are retained which could disappear with over-polishing. As a result of this process, a lacquer painting will take several months, maybe several years in more extensive pieces, to complete. The medium may not suit everyone as contact with the resin can sometimes lead to swelling and an itchy rash popularly known as "lacquer corrosion". Though it usually disappears after a while, for some people, the reaction can be severe. Hence, not every Vietnamese artist can practise in this genre while others find the process to be too time-consuming.

Lacquer painting continues to be an important subject in Vietnamese art schools and is practised by both young and older artists in Vietnam. The types of expression that can be found in lacquer painting are diverse, from realist and figurative imagery to highly abstract renderings. Despite the varied approaches, what is important is that lacquer painting continues in the present to be highly regarded as a fine art genre that evokes the essence of cultural identity and much at the same time, embraces the modern and contemporary. [JF]

from all his positions in the arts in 1989. He was faulted for his over-emphasis on international art for indeed several issues of *My Thuat* in 1988 featured nothing else but articles on Western art. His friend and associate Thai Ba Van, who being the expert on non-Vietnamese art had written many of the articles, was also suspended from publishing in the magazine. Despite his dismissal from the Association, Quan remained an influential figure in the art scene throughout the 1990s till today. He would fondly recall his observation that the favoured subjects of the bygone Revolutionary Period – the Hero, Soldier and Farmer – were replaced by the “Woman, Fish and Flower” in paintings of the 1990s where they spoke of artist’s individuality.³²

Within the atmosphere of individuality in expression, exploration and experimentation, it was not surprising that by the mid-1990s, media such as installation and performance art was beginning to emerge in Vietnam, albeit experimental in nature. As noted by Kraevskaia in her article on Nguyen Minh Thanh, the installation work that he put together in 1996 grew out of “an overwhelming desire to break out of his classical formal training” rather than a conceptual and theoretical foundation.³³ She observed that the need to preserve the integrity of the objects and often their context within the Vietnamese society resulted in artists using such modes of art-making for visual representation. Hence, constructing visual effects rather than conceptualising the work, was a characteristic of his first ventures in this genre. Understandably, installation art was then something of a novelty and not fully comprehended by the art community. What it presented in terms of its impact was an alternate approach in the presentation of the artworks. Concurrently, there arose situations in which artists like Tran Luong became disillusioned with the impending commodification of art. Luong saw the practice of the less marketable installation and performance art media as his reaction against the art market and he stopped painting entirely. However, perhaps for these very reasons and more, that it has not been easy for artists who practise in these genres, particularly performance art. Even now, they constantly face censorship by the cultural authorities despite the relative freedom that artists are given currently. Often, reasons for the suppression were not clearly given and this has led instead to much speculations. The artists could not fathom the reason for the suppression or why their art was considered to be “dangerous”. It could possibly be that performance art was perceived as



View of installation *The Skin* by Le Vu in the exhibition, *Red, Yellow, Green* in 2002 at the Goethe Institut, Hanoi.



Le Vu, *The Skin* (detail)

something different and not conforming to the strict guidelines or perhaps misunderstood to be political and critical of the government and society.³⁴ Interestingly enough, instead of hampering and obstructing the growing presence of this medium in the Vietnamese art

scene, the situation is deemed as a challenge and stimulation for most artists. It is true though, that censorship could have driven a number of artists abroad. One such artist was Truong Tan. Tan who was known for his controversial paintings on homosexuality and aids³⁵ and his art performances, decided to leave for Paris to seek "freedom and regeneration from geographical and cultural translocation." An influential artist whom many young artists consider as their "hero", Tan has chosen to leave the country, but in the recent years, he has returned often to Hanoi where he is currently exhibiting and practising performance art. And so, despite the suppression and lack of government support, the relatively young contemporary art scene in Vietnam will survive with the determination of these contemporary artists.

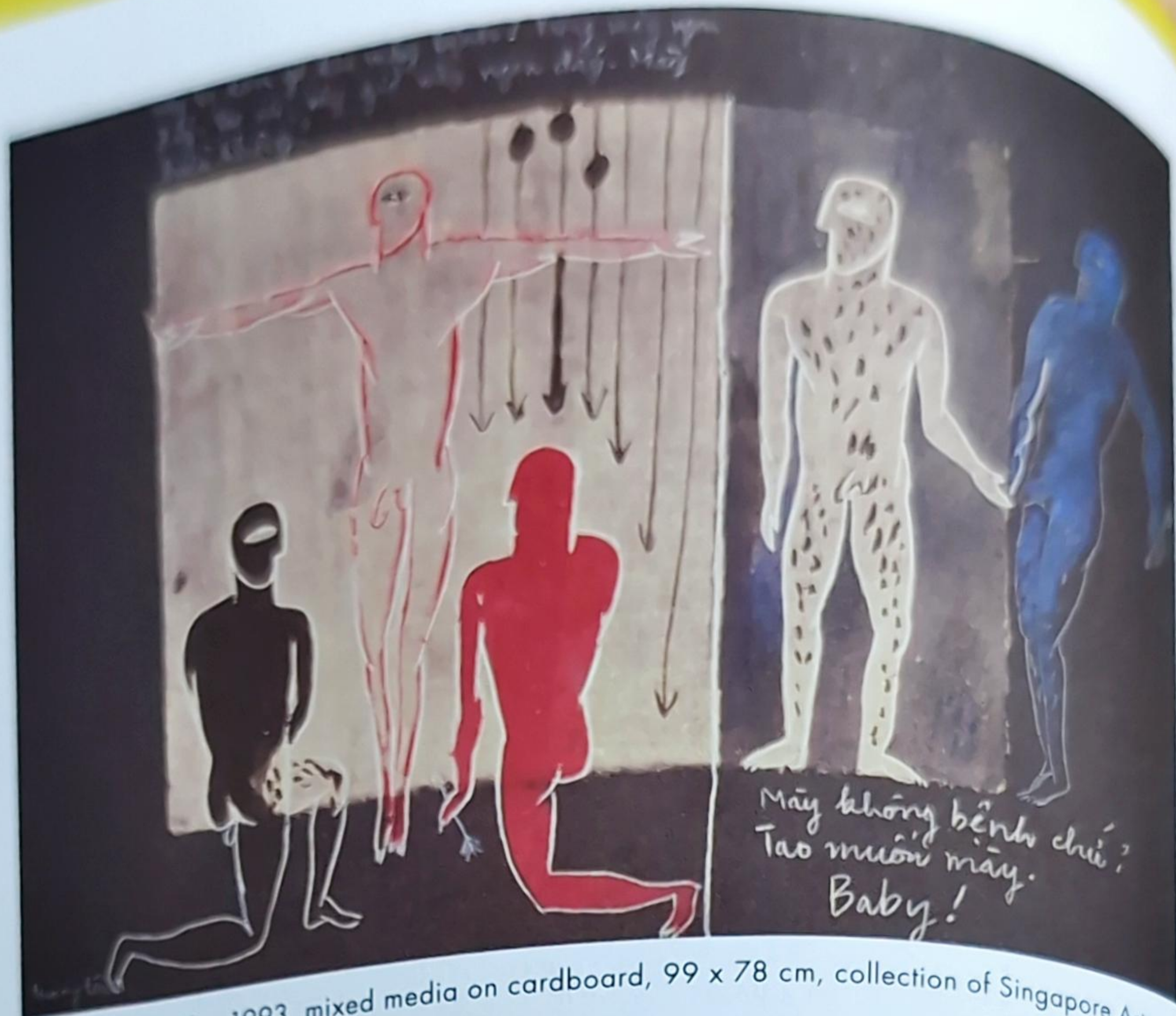
There is however one more important factor that was crucial for the fostering of contemporary art practices and cannot be ignored –the continuing support of foreign funds and institutions such as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, Goethe Institut and Alliance Française whose headquarters are located in Hanoi. Interestingly under the current requirement that all public art exhibitions

must obtain approval from the Ministry of Culture, these institutions offer a public platform for experimental works in Hanoi. For this reason, important exhibitions such as the *Red, Yellow, Green* in 2002 curated by Tran Luong at the Goethe Institut, an exhibition that is considered to have "set the tone for contemporary art practices in Hanoi", could be realised. Unfortunately these institutions do not have a strong presence in Ho Chi Minh City. Without such exhibition spaces run by these foreign cultural institutions and support of their respective embassies, realising challenging exhibitions and events proved to be challenging. Nonetheless, artists in Ho Chi Minh City have found alternatives and means to continue with their practices in independent spaces, the presence of which will be touched upon later in this report.

Despite the obstacles these experimental artists in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City face, installation and performance art genres has and will continue to develop. The latter was recently given further boost with the launch of the CDEF (Cultural Development and Exchange Fund) talent prize by the Danish Embassy in Hanoi on 4 June 2008. The prize will focus on artists below the age of 25 years who work in this genre.³⁶ And with the younger generation of artists being groomed and given opportunities and support to create experimental works, Vietnamese art is believed presently to be entering a new phase in its development.

Silk Painting

The pioneer artist that is closely connected to the development of modern expression in silk painting is Nguyen Phan Chanh (1892 – 1984). Schooled in the Confucian tradition, Chanh brought his experience in calligraphy and brush painting into the medium. Ironically it seemed, he was not adept at oil painting and with the encouragement of Victor Tardieu at L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine he experimented with painting on silk. His painting *Children Playing a Game of Squares* was well-received in the 1931 Paris International Colonial Exhibition and firmly established the medium as a modern Vietnamese expression. Throughout the 20th century, Vietnamese artist used silk as their medium of expression in realist and abstract paintings. Younger artists that are featured in this exhibition such as Nguyen Thi Chau Giang recounted that silk painting was taught as a basic subject in school. Although she did not major in silk painting, she recently found interest in experimenting in the medium. Due to the highly absorbent characteristic silk, it can be challenging to the artist as they are required to anticipate the colour spread that is dependent on the wetness of the brush. Other artists such as Phan Cam Thuong regards the medium as embodying both an ethnic and national identity through which he explores images related to Vietnamese traditions and customs. [JF]

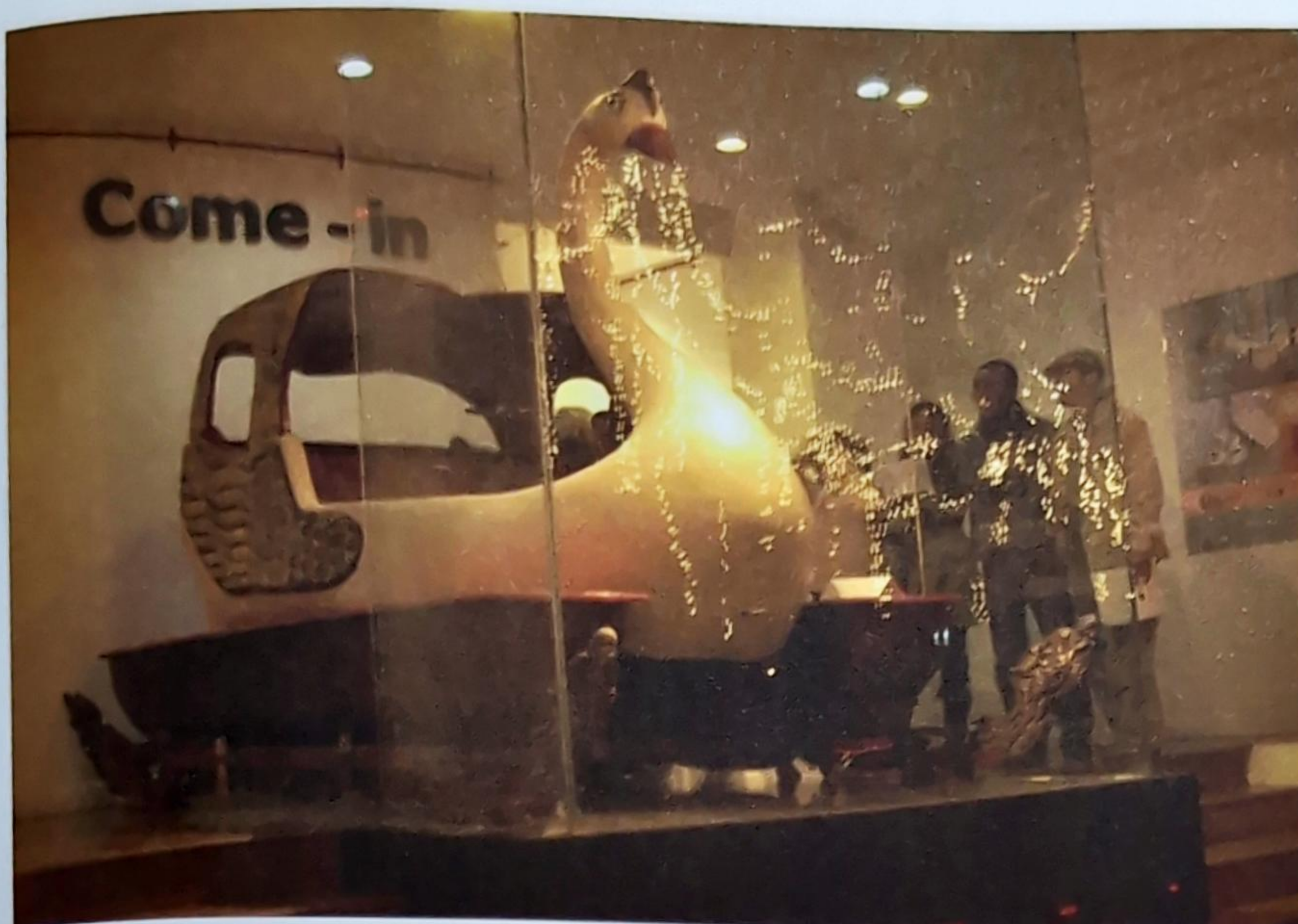


Truong Tan, *Baby*, 1993, mixed media on cardboard, 99 x 78 cm, collection of Singapore Art Museum

A Recovering Art Scene OR A New Phase?

When Vietnam entered the new millennium, the art market was in a depression. The interest in Vietnamese art became relatively less than how it was in the early 1990s. The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 made the situation worse although Vietnam was considered by financial experts to have been somewhat shielded from it by its strict control over capital and the banking sector.³⁷ As Asian economies began their recovery, the art market for Asian art saw the phenomenal surge in the prices of contemporary Chinese art that continues into the present with a strong international interest. As for Vietnamese art, a recent report in the International Herald Tribune quoted a representative from Christie's Singapore saying that "Vietnam is keenly watched and observed and anticipated." Basing her observation on recent auctions where there was a seemingly softening of interest for Chinese contemporary art while the prices for art works by contemporary Indonesian artists have increased significantly over the past year, she speculated that Vietnamese art might be the next "big" thing.³⁸ This sentiment seemed to be shared by many potential art buyers who are now watching and waiting to see if Vietnamese contemporary art will take off as prices are still relatively lower than those of her Southeast Asian neighbours'.

With interest picking up on Vietnamese art over the last few years, the art galleries in Vietnam are currently doing relatively well. However, the gallery



Courtesy of artist

The installation *Temple of Love* by Nguyen Quang Huy at an exhibition organised by Goethe Institut involving German and Vietnamese artists in January 2007.

system in place is still immature, unlike the West where top galleries enjoy exclusive representation of their artists. In Vietnam, works by the same artists can be purchased from various galleries and these works are not necessarily consigned to them. Furthermore, these local galleries do not often engage in promotional activities to raise awareness of their artists. This is not to say that there are no professional art galleries operating in Vietnam and certainly, there are gallerists attempting to do so where their presence is observed in regional art fairs. Unfortunately the current situation is fuelled by misgivings as well – top artists are losing confidence in the gallery system with many feeling that gallery commissions are not justifiable. Moreover, galleries are also facing competition from collectors, in particular Americans who are rumoured to seek out top artists, persuading them to sell their works exclusively to them. One such rumour pertained to artist Le Quang Ha whose early figurative works were romantic has changed his direction, producing social commentary works in a German expressionist manner. Accordingly, a collector attempted to not only purchase all his works but also have him enter into a contractual agreement on any future works. It is also said that during the recent visit by President George Bush, three of his paintings that were hanging in Hanoi's Bobbie Chinn Restaurant were purchased on the spot by one of the delegates and shipped off the next year on Air Force One!

Although by and large, Vietnamese art remains characteristically poetic and lyrical, there is a growing sense of social consciousness among the contemporary artists today – the need to reflect on the society in which economic progress is fast changing both the physical environment and the social make-up of the population. Though the subtlety in expressing concerns and personal feelings is still apparent among the Vietnamese art being produced today, it is inevitable that social commentary works are slowly but surely emerging. By this move, the art scene in Vietnam is evidently growing or even thriving as self expression in the desire to communicate societal ideals and concerns takes shape in artists' practices. This however is not a sudden development but began as early as the early 1990s when Truong Tan consciously touched on social issues and the dichotomy of progress and conservatism. Such social commentary art creates a dilemma for Vietnam's cultural authorities that still rigidly insist that the artistic

The Cyclo

The cyclo or *xich lo* when it first appeared in Vietnam before the war, was a manually operated vehicle which the operator would pull the carriage while running on foot. It was considered a luxury mode of transportation during the colonial period for the French and a small circle of Vietnamese nobles. Hence, cyclo pullers were regarded as figures of subservience, embodying ideas of hardship and suffering.

Over time, the cyclo was modified into a tricycle, and drivers would pedal their charges to their desired destinations. It became a common and convenient mode of public transportation for many decades until 1990s, when the city area expanded and people were travelling greater distances than before. The call for increased mobility resulted in the call for a more convenient and faster mode of transportation. This brought about the "motorbike storm" that caused the demise of the cyclo. The cyclo is now banned from entering city centres in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi as the cumbersome vehicle would compound the traffic congestion that these cities are now facing.

During the pre-*Doi Moi* years when the Vietnamese economy was generally depressed, the cyclo was seen as a last resort for making ends meet for those who could not find alternative means of living. Artists like Nguyen Than, who once served in the South Vietnam Army and is a Catholic, cited that he became a cyclo rider in order to provide for his family. He was not privileged in the system could not gain admittance to the Fine Arts Association to continue painting, or receive gainful employment in the government sector.

In contemporary art practices, the cyclo may be used as a symbol for the past and to represent the sufferings of the masses.



A performance *Welts* by Tran Luong during *Ket Noi: Vietnam-Singapore Performance Art Event* at the Singapore Art Museum, 2008.

Art Education in Vietnam

Artists are widely recognised and respected in Vietnam for the important role they play as cultural workers and in defining a national identity through their works. For that reason, the choice of becoming an artist is highly regarded in the society, and the ability to gain an entrance to one of the country's three universities in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hue is therefore deemed prestigious.

The five-year art programme in the Hanoi University of Fine Arts is based on the traditional French academic system, inherited from L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine (The Indochina College of Fine Art). Founded in 1925 during the French colonial period, the college located in Hanoi functioned as the main art institution for aspiring artists from the French Indochinese countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Its curriculum, in turn, followed closely that of L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Although it was not the earliest art school started by the French, the Hanoi school had a greater impact in the development of modern art in Vietnam. The southern School of Drawing in the Gia Dinh district, about ten kilometres from Saigon proper, was established earlier in 1913 by the French engineering architect Andre Joyeux. As it focused more on graphic and decorative arts, the Gia Dinh school was considered a provincial institution and thus had little bearing on the development of modern art in Vietnam. The Ecole Tardieu. He strongly believed that his Vietnamese students, given a proper education, could be trained as fine artists. Tardieu also had a genuine interest in the local art making techniques and encouraged the experimentation with traditional media. As with the Ecole's curriculum, there is a continued strong focus on traditional art forms where students are acquainted with painting on silk and lacquer.

The Hanoi University of Fine Arts that evolved from the Ecole after a couple of name changes, first from School of Fine Arts that functioned in Tay Bac during the Resistance War and subsequently as Hanoi College of Fine Arts when it was relocated back in Hanoi, follows a conservative curriculum. Still based on the traditional French art academy despite Western contemporary art being taught, it has a strong focus on a realist art approach where students are required to go through a series of life studies classes and to follow a strict regime in traditional media of silk and lacquer. Most students continued to preserve and complete their university education because quitting school is not an option for most. The difficulty in gaining admittance – potential candidates need to undergo a three-year preparation course and tested vigorously in the entrance examinations – and the prestige of being in the art school left most feeling that leaving without completing the programme is not a choice that they have. Besides, artists who are self-taught without the proper paper qualification are not given credence in the Vietnamese society.

Besides the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Vietnamese artists may be graduates of two other universities in the south. The first, Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts evolved from the previously mentioned School of Drawing. The School was first renamed Gia Dinh College of Fine Arts when the Republic of Vietnam was formed and subsequently came to be known as the National Fine Arts College of Saigon. Its curriculum was also based on the traditional French art academy as well as the Fine Arts College of Rome. Despite the Republic being under the influence of the United States, the college recruited its teachers from France and Hanoi. The second art institution in the south is located in Hue where the Hue College of Fine Arts was founded in 1957. The college was later transformed as the Hue College of the Arts when it merged with the National College of Music and Dramatic Arts in 1986, and thereafter since 1994, it came under the Hue University as one of its faculties. [JF]

community to reflect positively the country's economic progress and not satirise the forces of law and order, nor extol decadent and lascivious behaviour.³⁹ As succinctly remarked by Vietnam correspondent Roger Mitton for *Straits Times*: "But a hubbub erupted there earlier this year, and it reflected Hanoi's dilemma in trying to control information and the arts while integrating with the global community."⁴⁰ Tan's later works were bold statements of homosexuality and problems with aids, which resulted in his works being banned from public display. For an example, in a recent incident, Tan created a furore with his installation *Hidden Beauty*⁴¹ in Hanoi's Viet Art Centre that commented on the corruption of the law enforcement personnel, causing the work to be removed from the exhibition. These incidences have resulted in him leaving the country as mentioned earlier in this article. And again in Besides Tan, in a less controversial manner, Dang Xuan Hoa and Ha Tri Hieu who by embracing the art market, started painting about the street children and poverty in their later series, turning away from their early works that depicted idyll rural scenery and everyday objects. Younger artists such as Ha Manh Thang and Vuong Van Thao have commented on commercialisation and public fixation on branded goods, and the need for preservation of fragile history and heritage, both of which that are endangered in face of the current economic progress in their recent works. A commendable mention must also be made of young artist Pham Huy Thong whose painting *Petit Ange (Little Angel)* has been featured in the *Post-Doi Moi* exhibition. This painting was Thong's empathy for what happened recently to young writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu – her novel *Endless Field* was mistakenly banned as a criticism against the government and later reinstated when a clarification was made along with the immense support of the public shown for her – where he has highlighted the ignorance of traditionalists who hamper progressiveness and development. Another noticeable group is that of the women artists such as Nguyen Thi Chau Giang and Dinh Y Nhi; they are not necessarily feminists but certainly have consciously commented on their own positions and status as women in the Vietnamese society. And so, within a still conservative environment that has defined vaguely what is considered to be acceptable in terms of artistic practices while wanting to raise Vietnam on an international platform, contemporary artists are treading carefully as did their predecessors. But perhaps with Vietnam advancing along an open-market orientation, their



Courtesy of Tran Luong

View of installation *Vinawind* by Nguyen Manh Hung in the exhibition, *Red, Yellow, Green* in 2002 at the Goethe Institut, Hanoi. The installation comprises 30 fans from different periods made in different countries.

daring and concerted efforts to push boundaries may give rise to a distinct movement in the near future.

Besides a revived art market as Vietnam enters the new millennium, the art scene is also progressing with exhibitions of Vietnamese art being staged overseas, especially those of contemporary art. Since Nguyen Xuan Tiep's representation at the *First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*⁴² organised by the Queensland Art Gallery, Australia in 1993, Vietnamese artists have gone on to participate in biennials and triennials. Group and solo exhibitions are also abounding overseas and examples of cultural exhibitions are *Gap Vietnam* in House of World Cultures, Berlin in 1999, *Vietnam Art Actuel* at the University of Montreal and, in the recent, *Trans-POP: Vietnam Korea Remix*. The latter exhibition was curated by Viet Le, a doctorate candidate with the University of Southern California. There has definitely been a steady increase in Vietnamese artists' participation in international

activities. However, as pointed out by art historian Nora Taylor, there is still a need for a major exhibition on Vietnamese art in the United States. Strangely enough, substantial funding has been given over the years by American funding institutions such as Asian Cultural Council and Rockefeller Foundation in support of Vietnamese art projects, but American museums have yet to stage a significant display of Vietnamese art and to accept Vietnamese art as part of modern and contemporary art practices.⁴³ Despite this, presence of Vietnamese art overseas is sustained and even increasing, besides which, it is also important to note the presence of foreign artists working in Vietnam. Bradford Edwards and Veronika Radulovic are familiar names that have close associations with the art community, especially in Hanoi. Edwards, an American artist living in Vietnam since the 1990s, made significant contributions in creating awareness of contemporary art practices in the country. He has made known his observations regularly in the

magazine *Asian Art News* devoted to the arts in the region, and continues to do so. Bradford also practices and has participated in joint shows, collaborations and workshops with Vietnamese artist. German artists Radulovic, in a similar vein, worked closely with the contemporary artists to stage exhibitions and events during her tenure in the country where she taught for a number of years at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts. A close friend of Truong Tan, her colleague in the University, she paid close attention to the developing contemporary art scene in Hanoi and given much support by Goethe Institut, she put together group shows in the institution. Even though she has now resettled in Germany, she continues to have close ties with Vietnam, returning whenever she has the opportunity. Australian artist Sue Hadju and Japanese artist Motoko Uda together with local artist and writer Nguyen Nhu Huy started the first independent art space in Ho Chi Minh City. Known as A Little Blah Blah, it has importantly introduced to the art community not only an alternate way of creating works but another venue for exhibition, as well as a forum in which art talks, exchanges and other art activities can take place. It serves as a catalyst for the contemporary art community and over time, other alternate art spaces have begun emerging in the city as well as in Hanoi.⁴⁴ Besides foreign artists, foreigners like Suzanne Lecht should also be mentioned for their role in promoting Vietnamese art. An American in Hanoi, Lecht runs a highly successful art gallery, which has brought Vietnamese art to the United States and consciously promoting them to foreigners visiting Vietnam. Another individual whose remarkable vision in setting up a well researched and documented art collection should be mentioned is Witness Collection's director Adrian Jones. Jones, a British businessman whose love affair with Vietnamese art started in the 1980s and who has systematically purchased and built up a museum-quality collection of paintings, recently began an archival project in his bid to help preserve history and information that will prove to be invaluable for research into Vietnam's art history.

Another important consideration, the growing presence of *Viet Kieu* artists must be made in the discussion of the contemporary art scene in Vietnam. *Viet Kieu* is a term used to describe Vietnamese living overseas or those who grew up outside of the country. Vietnam's tumultuous history has resulted in an exodus of its people in the last century⁴⁵ although besides war, there are other reasons for the migration, such as mixed parentage or economic reasons. Whatever the causes may be,

the opening up of Vietnam attracted a number of Viet Kieu back to settling in the major cities, although Ho Chi Minh City is by far more attractive to them than Hanoi. – Dinh Q Le⁴⁶, who has a successful artistic career in California, started making arrangements to create a home base in Ho Chi Minh City in the mid-1990s; Richard Streitmatter-Tran, a performance and multimedia artist who was adopted as an infant by an American family when visiting in 1992, decided that he would stay, settling down to teach and create works; Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba whose parentage is Vietnamese-Japanese was born in Tokyo, grew up in Texas and returned to live in the city of his father's, and has through his *Memorial Project Nha Trang* film, received international attention that led easily made him "Vietnam's most internationally known contemporary artist"⁴⁷. Regardless of their personal histories, the presence of these Viet Kieu artists has stimulated the art scene, particularly in the south, and has brought ideas of establishing alternative art spaces and independent art groups. Dinh Q Le has recently established an independent art space⁴⁸, San Art that has his personal financial support as well as the support of grants and individual contributions. The objective of the organisation is to facilitate exchanges and create programmes and exhibitions in support of the art community. One such programme is the six-month residency that Zoe Butt – a former curator at the Queensland Art gallery and currently the programme director of Beijing-based Long March – undertook last year, culminating in the exhibition *Diary of a travelling City* that featured contemporary works of young Vietnamese artists in January 2008. Nguyen-Hatsushiba and Streitmatter-Tran are part of an independent art group, *Mogas Station*⁴⁹ that has participated in projects since 2005 in Shanghai, Singapore, Venice, Shenzhen and Hong Kong. As affirmed by Nguyen Nhu Huy who has been writing on these artists – with most sharing more or less the same past with the Vietnamese artists, their contributions have begun a new phase and are perhaps creating a new future for the local art scene.

Whether Vietnam is entering a new phase in its art development or it is simply a revival of the art scene and market, there is no doubt that the art community is thriving and growing. A younger group of artists is slowly gaining its prominence and there is a lot more experimentation art than before. Therefore for our purpose at hand – to put together an exhibition – we decided to develop a survey of Vietnamese art after *Doi Moi* and reflect some of the changes that



Ha Manh Thang, *Bride and Bridegroom*, 2008, acrylic on paper, 200 x 200 cm, collection of Singapore Art Museum.

took place over the 18 years. We adopted a thematic approach and grouped the art works into four categories – “Individual” to reflect the greater freedom in artistic expressions as well as the sense of individuality; “Reminiscence” the idea of memory and nostalgia that strongly characterise Vietnamese art, “Land” as a signifier of cultural and ethnic identity; and “Transformation” where the adaptation of cultural signs and traditions in the creation of contemporary expressions. Attempts were made to feature works that would reveal the observations made above as well as being examples of those very observations. This modest display of 62 works by 48 artists was then supplemented by papers presented at the three-day symposium that covered history from the colonial period to the present. A taste of Vietnamese performance art was also given to Singapore audience through *Ket Noi: Vietnam-Singapore Performance Art Exchange* where works were presented over three evenings. This has been a worthwhile project for us in SAM and by no means is it exhaustive or inclusive in its selection of artists, but rather our hope that it will be a start for other exhibition and research projects that will cumulatively amount to a deeper understanding of Vietnamese modern and contemporary art.

Notes

1. NHB came into existence in 1993 with the merger of the National Museum, the National Archives and the Oral History Department. While the Oral History Department came under the National Archives of Singapore (NAS), three museums emerged from the National Museum – the Singapore Art Museum, Asian Civilisations Museum and the Singapore History Museum. The latter is currently known as the National Museum of Singapore (NAMOS). The Vietnamese Festival is the first integrated event where its member institutions came together to organise activities with the same focus. While SAM put together *Post-Doi Moi*, ACM organised the exhibition *From Myth of Modernity*, NAMOS had its Vietnamese Film Festival *55 Years of Vietnam Film*, and NAS displayed film posters. The Singapore Philatelic Museum (SPM) which is an incorporated entity under NHB, promoted Vietnamese stamps and cultural costumes in *Journey Through the Land of Lotus*. There were also other cultural activities such as Vietnamese Cooking Demonstration, Fauna of Vietnam and Vietnam Fiestas.
2. This two-week exhibition was mounted in celebration of Singapore's 30 years of diplomatic ties with Vietnam. Important works like Pham Ke An *Recalling One Late Afternoon in Tay Bac* as well as works by Nguyen Sang, Nguyen Tu Nghiem and Bui Xuan Phai were shown.
3. Taylor wrote her PhD dissertation *The Artist and the State: The Politics of Painting and National Identity in Hanoi, Vietnam 1925-1995* for Cornell University and has since authored a book *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art* and numerous articles on painters in Hanoi. She teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and recently curated the travelling exhibition *Changing Identities* in the United States that focused on women artists.
4. Huynh-Beattie is currently a curator at the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in Australia. She completed her doctorate at the Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney in 2005 with her dissertation entitled *Vietnamese Aesthetics from 1925 Onwards*.
5. Luong was one of the artists in the famous *Hanoi Gang of Five*. He has since established himself as a contemporary artist and curator, having taken on the directorship of the Vietnam Centre of Contemporary Art in Hanoi from its inception in 1997 to 2003 and in organising and participating in performance and installation art events. Findlay, Ian, "Notes from Hanoi" in *Asian Art News*, vol.11, No.4, July-August 2001, pp.38-39.
6. Both Lee Wen and Jason Lim are accomplished artists in performance art and have come together to organise *Future of Imagination*, a series on performance art in Singapore where it featured international artists.. They also participated in numerous international events.
7. The symposium proceedings will be published in English and Vietnamese with additional articles on contemporary art practices. The publication is targeted for completion in December 2008. For the workshop and performance art event, the documentation will also be published in a journal later in the year.
8. Howard, Ian, "Discovery and Innovation" in *Asian Art News*, March-April 1997, p.44. In Ho Chi Minh City, the Tu Do Gallery, owned by painter Tran Thi Thu Ha, was reported to have started in June 1989, making it the first private art gallery to be established in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. See "Galleries of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi" in *Asian Art News*, vol.4, No.3, May/June 1994, p.18 Vietnam Supplement.
9. Bui, Thanh Phuong and Tran Hau Tuan, "Portraits and Self-Portraits (1969-1987)" in *Bui Xuan Phai*, Hanoi: Fine Arts Publishing House, 19898, p.346.
10. Conversation with Natalie Kraevskaia in January 2008. Six of Phai's sketches are on loan to the Singapore Art Museum for a memorial display to commemorate the artist's 20th death anniversary (12 May to 28 September 2008).
11. See country reports in *Asian Art News* in May/June 1994 and March/April 1997 issues.
12. The first state-owned gallery, Art Gallery 7 Hang Khay under the Ministry of Culture, was first established in Hanoi in 1965. Their activities were restricted to selling goods that were sanctioned by the State, including souvenirs, statuary and paintings. It only started functioning as an art gallery in 1988, following the implementation of *Doi Moi* policy, to promote artists by organising exhibitions of local artists and selling works to foreigners. Plum Blossoms Gallery collaborated with Art Gallery 7 Hang Khay to organise *Uncorked Soul* in 1991. Viet, Hai, "Foreword" in *Uncorked Soul: Contemporary Art from Vietnam*, 1991, p.VII..
13. "Galleries of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi", p.18.
14. The artists were Bui Xuan Phai, Nguyen Tu Nghiem, Le Cong Thanh, Pham Viet Hai, Tran Luu Hau, Trinh Cung, Nguyen Trung, Hoang Dang Nhuan, Do Thi Ninh, Buu Chi, Nguyen Quan, Nguyen Than, Bui Suoi Hoa, Dang Xuan Hoa and Tran Trong Vu. They were from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hue.
15. Taylor, Nora, *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2004, pp.111-12.
16. Hoa was selected in 1994 by the Vietnam Association of Fine Arts to embark on a six-month residency programme organised by the Indochina Arts Project (IPA) in the United States. He returned in August that year.
17. *Painter in Hanoi*, p.125.
18. In an interview with Nora Taylor for her book, *Painters in Hanoi*, Hoa remarked how during the early 1990s, he had to finish a painting within two to three hours as they were sold out fast with foreign buyers emptying out his studio (p.112-13). At the recent Borobudur Auction (Singapore, 17 May 2008), his painting *Circle of Life* was sold at SGD108,000 (US\$80,000) at more than four times its estimated value at SGD25,000 to 27,000 (USD18,116 to USD19,565). This is a record high for the artist as his paintings garnered around €6,875 (US\$10,700) in previous auctions. See recent auction results on <http://www.borobudurauction.com/borobudur/result/Southeast%20Asian%20Contemporary%20Art%2017%20May%202008.htm>.
19. Hantover, Jeffrey, "The Road Through the Village" in *Art America*, 03/95, <http://www.asiart.com/Hantover.htm> accessed on 7 July 2008 at 11.42pm.
20. Findlay, Ian and Helene Hagemans, "Changing Times" in *Asian Art News*, March/April 1997, p.43.
21. See *Bui Xuan Phai*, pp. 221-22.
22. Taylor, Nora, *Painters in Hanoi*, p.79.
23. An example of an exhibition is the 1962 International Art Exhibition in Saigon where it featured artists from Asia and Western countries. Majority of the art works were abstract paintings. Huynh-Beattie, Boitran, *ibid*, p.249-52.
24. The artists were not necessarily influenced by the American Abstract Expressionism as noted by Huynh-Beattie, the Vietnamese artists did not readily absorb the American culture which they deemed to be inferior to the French. She rationalised that with such an attitude taken in general, the American had little impact on the art scene in Saigon despite their heavy involvement in the Republic. See p.239-41.
25. Bui, Thanh Phuong and Tran Hau Tuan, *Bui Xuan Phai*, Hanoi: Fine Arts Publishing House, 1998, pp.180-83. It is possible that these undated paintings were produced after Phai came into contact with his old friends whom he had not seen since they left Hanoi in 1954. However, in the book, the authors claimed that these abstract paintings were produced between 1970 and 1972. One interesting point to note is the titling of the works as "Experiment 1" to "Experiment 4" when four of the paintings were exhibition in Phai's solo exhibition in 1984. Currently, three of these paintings are in the collection of Singapore Art Museum.
26. Howard, Ian, *Ibid*, p.44.

27. Thai Ba Van (1934-1994) was the only trained art historian in Vietnam who studied at Karlova University, Prague. He was an employee of the Hanoi Institute of Art Research and wrote mostly on Soviet and Eastern European art.
28. It is only in the recent years that younger artists like Nguyen Minh Thanh, Nguyen Van Cuong (1962, Hanoi) and Nguyen Quang Huy (1971, Ha Tay) are starting to dismiss the importance of joining the Association. See Bradford, Edwards, "A Stir in the Ranks" in *Asian Art News*, March/April 1997, p.50.
29. Pham, Cam Thuong, "Nguyen Quan" in *Nguyen Quan*, Hanoi: Fine Arts Publishing House, 1997, p.10.
30. Quan's interest in surrealism led him to conceive the idea for the workshop which he came across while reading on Andre Breton and Marcel Duchamp and how they would organise meetings where artists were encouraged to work and collaborate spontaneously. Taylor, Nora, *Painters in Hanoi*, pp.89-90.
31. *Ibid.*
32. In conversation with Quan, January 2008.
33. Kraevskaia, Natalie, "Missing a Kiss: The Art of Nguyen Minh Thanh" in *From Nostalgia Towards Exploration: Essays on Contemporary Art in Vietnam*, Hanoi: Kim Dong Publishing House, 2005, p.60.
34. McGeown, Kate, "Vietnam art scene slowly revives", <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/6186608.stm>, published on 2006/12/01 17:15:03 GMT.
35. Larimer, Tim, "Simple Pleasures: Their Influences are War, Poverty and France, but Vietnam's Artists are Prospering in Unexpected Ways" in *Time Magazine*, vol.148, No.9, 26 August 1996.
36. "Launch of CDEF Talent Prize 2008 – Performance Art", <http://www.ambhanoi.um.dk/en/menu/AboutUs/News/LaunchOfCDEFTalentPrize2008PerformanceArt.htm>, edited on 5 June 2008.
37. The Asian Financial Crisis that occurred in mid-1997, also commonly known as the IMF (International Monetary Fund), raised fears that it might trigger a worldwide depression. It started with the Thai government's decision to float its currency which resulted in its collapse. It had a domino effect in the region and this led to the interjection of IMF, stepping in to initiate a USD40 billion stabilisation programme for South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia whose economies were worst hit. Although Vietnam was somewhat shielded from the Crisis as capital controls were still in place, the regional crisis did put the country in an economically less competitive position. The Vietnamese dong was not convertible and as a fixed currency, it was first devalued at 15 percent, lower than what other regional currencies that were devalued between 30 and 70 percent. With the value of the American dollar being relatively higher, the price of goods and services nearly tripled during 1997 and 1998. For details on the impact on Vietnam, see Doan, Phuong Lan, "The Asian Financial Crisis and its Implication for Vietnam's Financial System" in *Visiting Researchers Series No. 11*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000, pp.8-12.
38. Kolesnikov-Jessop, Sonia, "Vietnam's rising generation awaits recognition in the sale room" in *International Herald Tribune*, 26 March 2008, <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/03/26/arts/rcartviet.php> accessed on 7 July 2008 at 12.57am.
39. Mitton, Roger, "Hanoi fights to keep a lid on artistic expression" in *Straits Times*, 27 September 2007, accessed from <http://vietnamica.blogspot.com/> on 20 July 2008.
40. Mitton, *Ibid.*
41. Mitton, *Ibid.* This work in the form of a large diaper was part of a Goethe Institut sponsored exhibition that featured mostly foreign artists with few Vietnamese artists. The diaper was made from hundreds of pockets from Vietnamese traffic police sewn together. Besides this work, another entitled *Temple of Love* by Nguyen Quang Huy was banned that commented how courting couples find privacy in the swan-shaped pedal boats that are easily available at city lakes in Hanoi, highlighting "amorous sanctuaries for urban lovers". See report by Bill Hayton, "Nappy artwork gets Vietnam ban" at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6303101.stm>.
42. There were three Vietnamese artists in the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in 1996 with the participation of woman artist Dang Thi Khue, Vu Dan Tan and Mai Anh Dung, the former two living and working in Hanoi while the latter, in Ho Chi Minh City.
43. Taylor, Nora, *Painter in Hanoi*, pp.1-2. Taylor gave a plausible explanation as to why there is yet an acceptance of Vietnamese modern and contemporary art in United States, and in a similar vein, Asian art other than China's.
44. Ryllega Gallery in Hanoi marketed itself as an experimental contemporary art space and is run by artists Nguyen Minh Phuoc and Vu Huu Thuy. It is a non-profit organisation and was founded in 2004. See <http://www.ryllegahanoi.com/>.
45. Vietnam's tumultuous history during the 1960s and 1970s has resulted in large communities of Vietnamese living overseas – in United States and Europe. With the Fall of Saigon and the eventual transformation of the south into a communist country, a great number of South Vietnamese left the country during in the late 1970s; these illegal migrants seeking asylum were known as Boat People.
46. Dinh who was born in a village near the Cambodian border had to flee at the age 11 and after settling down in California, studied art at the University of California at Santa Barbara and School of Visual Arts in New York City. He was inspired by his aunt who is a grass mat weaver, on one of his visits and began creating a series of works where he weaved discarded photographs that led to his highly acclaimed work *Mot Coi Di Ve* (*Spending one's life trying to return home*) poignantly describing his sentiment.
47. Napack.
48. The first independent art space, A Little Blah Blah in Ho Chi Minh City was initiated in late 2004 by two foreign artists, Sue Hadju an Australian that is currently based there and Motoko Uda, Japanese who has now returned home and Vietnamese artist, curator and writer, Nguyen Nhu Huy. It offers residencies, talks and projects locally and overseas, attempting to link Vietnam with the rest of the world. See Nguyen, Nhu Huy, "HCMC contemporary art scene: new elements, 2007" at http://www.nhuhuy.com/htmls/weblogs_detail_en.php?f=1&logid=140&mon=0&ye=2007.
49. Other members include Sandrine Llouquet, Bertrand Peret, Hoang Duong Cam, Vo Phi Tam, Gulschan Goethel, Vu Lien Phuong and Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba.

Post ^{Việt Nam}Đổi Mới

**Vietnamese
Art After 1990**

INTRODUCTION

Since adopting the open-door policy in 1986 with the implementation of the Doi Moi (Renovation) policies, developments in art in Vietnam have corresponded to the dynamic changes taking place in the economic, social and political spheres. Artists experimented beyond Realism that was once regarded as a suitable artistic style, with both Western art approaches and the traditional arts, adapting, adopting and appropriating forms and appearances to which the end was often to create an art that is 'Vietnamese'.

Post-Doi Moi: Vietnamese Art after 1990 is set to examine the changes that took place after the implementation of the Renovation policies. An open-market economy replaced what was once a subsidy system implemented with the reunification of the country when North Vietnam won the war in 1975. The starting point in the exhibition is 1990 with the year marking the first commercial art gallery to open in Hanoi and on the assumption that the policies would have needed a period of gestation before changes became apparent. A total of 62 works by 46 artists is on display within four sections – Reminiscence, Land, Individual and Transformation. Through these themes, the changes in the development of art during the last two decades by three generations of artists – the first being the older artists who fought and participated in the American War as soldiers and army artists, the second being the generation that grew up during the American War and the last, young artists who were born after the late 1960s and do not have any recollections of the war – can be traced to provide some insights into the impact of the *Doi Moi* policies.

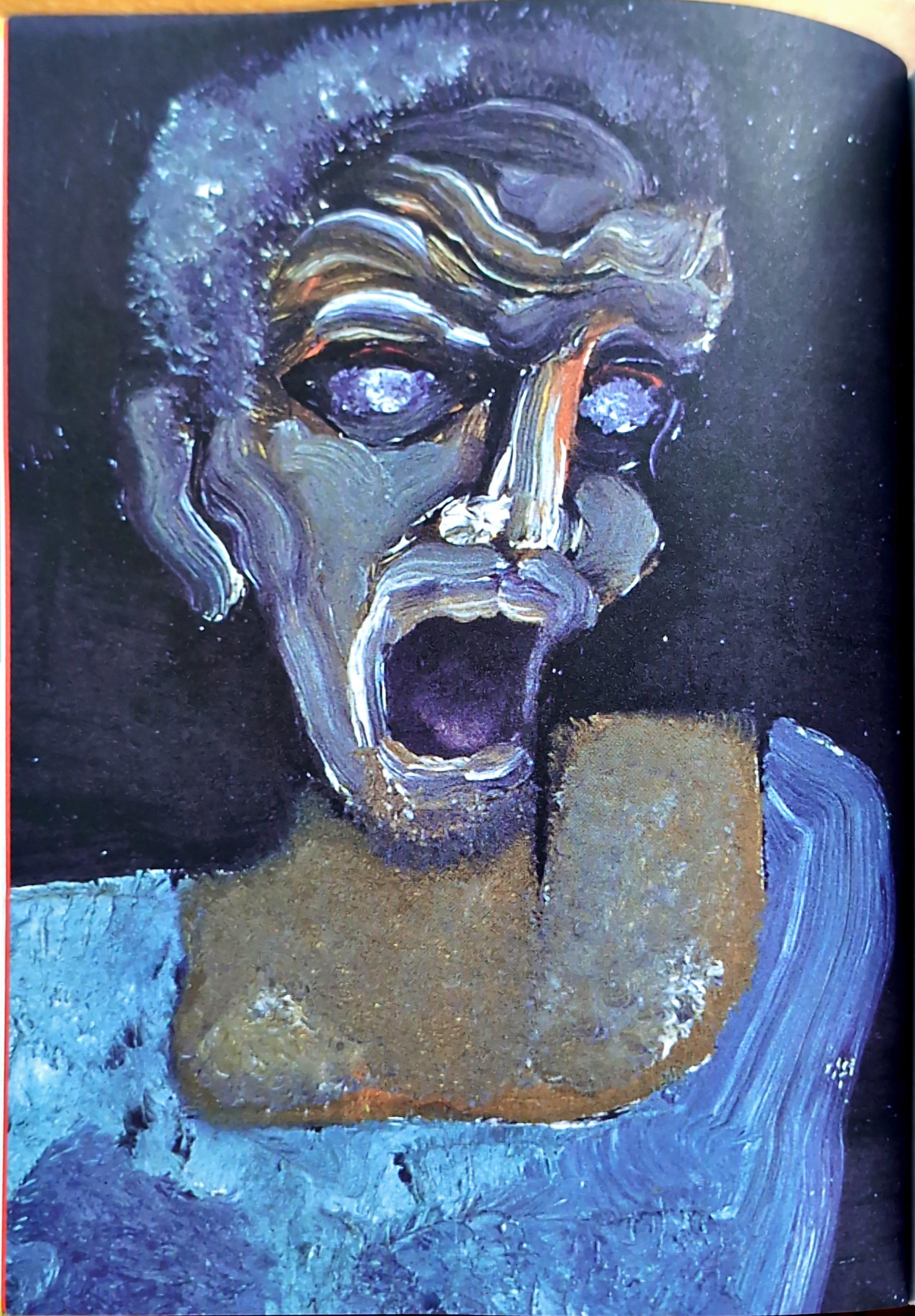
Post-Doi Moi: Vietnamese Art after 1990 is the visual arts component of the Vietnam Festival organised by the National Heritage Board in celebration of the 35 years of diplomatic ties between Singapore and Vietnam.

The individual or "self" as a subject in artistic expression is not unfamiliar to the Vietnamese artists despite the severe but loosely defined regulations imposed during the pre-*Doi Moi* era. Painting as in "art for art's sake" was greatly discouraged, and realist art that served the society was accepted as "true art". Therefore, artists who had worked under such stringent conditions found the environment in the post-*Doi Moi* era to be highly

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liberating and conducive for self-expression. This resulted in artists during the early 1990s producing numerous self-portraits, portraits of close friends and family as well as abstract works that evoke personal feelings and sentiment and paintings of everyday objects as metaphors of their lives. Under this theme, there were also commentaries on changing attitudes and the pining for the past that is fast disappearing *vis-à-vis* economic progress.

INDIVIDUAL





Buu Chi

Blind Man Playing the Monochord

1994

Oil on paper

73 x 87 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Rendered in a surrealistic and painterly manner, this angst-filled painting shows a blind man passionately playing the traditional Vietnamese stringed instrument known as a monochord. Introspective in the depiction, the artist had projected his self and emotions into the painting and allowed for it to be open to psychological interpretation. The work is representative of a phase of the artist's development where colours were sombre and figures were elongated, macabre and tortured. [JF]

Dang Xuan Hoa

Human Objects No 12

1992

Oil on canvas

80 x 100 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

"I paint not what I see, but what lies beneath what I see" is often quoted by Hoa who in conveying his personal feelings about his paintings. In *Human Object No 12*, the conventional rules of perspective are ignored in favour of an expressionist representation of a still-life. The painting displays a seemingly random selection of objects that, on closer inspection, are things easily found in a Vietnamese home. Functioning as signifiers for Vietnamese culture and life, the objects along with the family cat are arranged in a deliberate manner around a square-like form that represents a table. Human presence is alluded to by the hand holding a lit cigarette and another, carrying a bottle. Another presence with its lower body depicted is subtly represented in the upper left corner of the painting. By presenting these objects from his perspective, Hoa has intentionally drawn the viewer's attention to common things in his life and in doing so, endowing them with importance as subjects in a still-life painting. [JF]









Dinh Y Nhi

1-2-3-4

1994

Gouache on paper

75 x 106 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Nhi's paintings are characterised by simplicity of form and an often monochromatic palette. Her art nonetheless suggests a complex range of human emotions and meanings. In this painting, four couples are grouped together, yet each individual seems strangely isolated from the rest. This subtle estrangement and air of melancholy that surround her cartoon-like figures capture a depth of human experience and bestow upon this painting an enigmatic and compelling quality. [TSL]



Truong Tan

Buddhist

1993

Lacquer on board

99 x 78 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

This early lacquer work by Tan provides the artist's dichotomous view on the Vietnamese way of life through its two-panel presentation. In the left panel, the artist's familiar figure of a male nude is used and its standing pose with the front turned away from the viewer, evokes a sense of confidence and monumentality. At his feet is a squatting figure and its long hair suggests a female although it can also be androgynous. On the right panel, the scene is repeated with the standing figure with a side profile dressed in monk robes. The seated female figure whose gender is indicated by the conical hat is dressed in working clothes with her head resting on her knees. In front of her is a water puppet with a roughly sketched doll-like object next to it. Through these panels, Tan presents opposing views of the then Vietnamese society; one that is traditional and Buddhist co-existing with a fast-emerging progressive and liberal one. [JF]







Ha Tri Hieu

Self-Portrait V


1997

Oil on canvas

42 x 32 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

In this painting, the artist shows himself smoking. The head leans to the left in a gesture of lassitude. Elements such as the nose, ear, an eye, mouth and a hand are clearly outlined, sharply distinguishing the figure from the background. The work hints of Cubism, especially in the treatment of the face, but the brushstrokes are decidedly expressionist. [PL]



Hoang Duong Cam
Untitled, Flower by...
2006
Digital print
70 x 93 cm
Collection of the artist

Part of a series of quirky photographs entitled *Fat-Free Museum*, this image takes as its backdrop the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In this venerable space, the artist has playfully declared his presence by inserting his hand, holding a small picture of a well-known Vietnamese painting *A Girl with White Lilies*, 1943 by To Ngoc Van (1906, Hai Hong – 1954, Bien Dien Phu), with the artist's own face juxtaposed on top of the girl's contemplating the lily. This piece of Vietnamese culture at once enters into an interesting and provocative dialogue with Lucian Freud's portrait of a fleshy male nude in the background. Hoang's work delights its audience while simultaneously challenging them to question the relationships between people, places, objects and artefacts. [TSL]







Hoang Duong Cam
Untitled, Tightrope
2006
Digital print
70 x 93 cm
Collection of the artist

In his quirky series *Fat-Free Museum* that was produced during his artist's residency in New York City, Cam strategically inserts himself into his photographs taken at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Guggenheim Museum. Playing with scale and placement of objects, Hoang's good-humoured images establish links between his Vietnamese heritage in terms of the figures that he appropriated from Vietnamese pioneer silk painter Nguyen Phan Chanh (1892, Ha Tinh Province – 1984, Hanoi) and the Western museum context, inviting his viewers to revisit familiar (or perhaps unfamiliar) objects and images with critical eyes and a fresh perspective.

[TSL]



Le Hong Thai

Alone

1994

Lacquer on board

180 x 90 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Depth and outline are suggested by the juxtaposition of geometric areas of complementary colours on a flat surface. The style of Thai is strongly linked to the technique of lacquer painting, which requires colours to be layered one over the other. This work shows the influence of abstraction, with a minimalist slant and is about the intimate feelings of the artist, who often adds a spiritual dimension to his works. [PL]







Nguyen Nghia Cuong

Cuong's Smile

2005

Gouache on *do* paper

110 x 160 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

A smile is meant to welcome, and possibly to disarm; a gesture of friendship, it is offered in multiple social contexts, but rarely is it genuine. This seems to be the veiled criticism of modern society's superficialities, as suggested by the too-large-for-life pair of smiling lips that occupies the centre of this work - more of a caricature than a gesture of benevolence. Inside the gaping, smiling mouth, multiple self-portraits of the artist in different guises suggest that the motivations behind a smile are many and complex. It seems to be the artist's good-humoured warning to be wary of this simple facial gesture. [TSU]

Nguyen Quan (1948, Vinh Phu)

Self-Portrait Under the Moonlight

1992

Oil on canvas

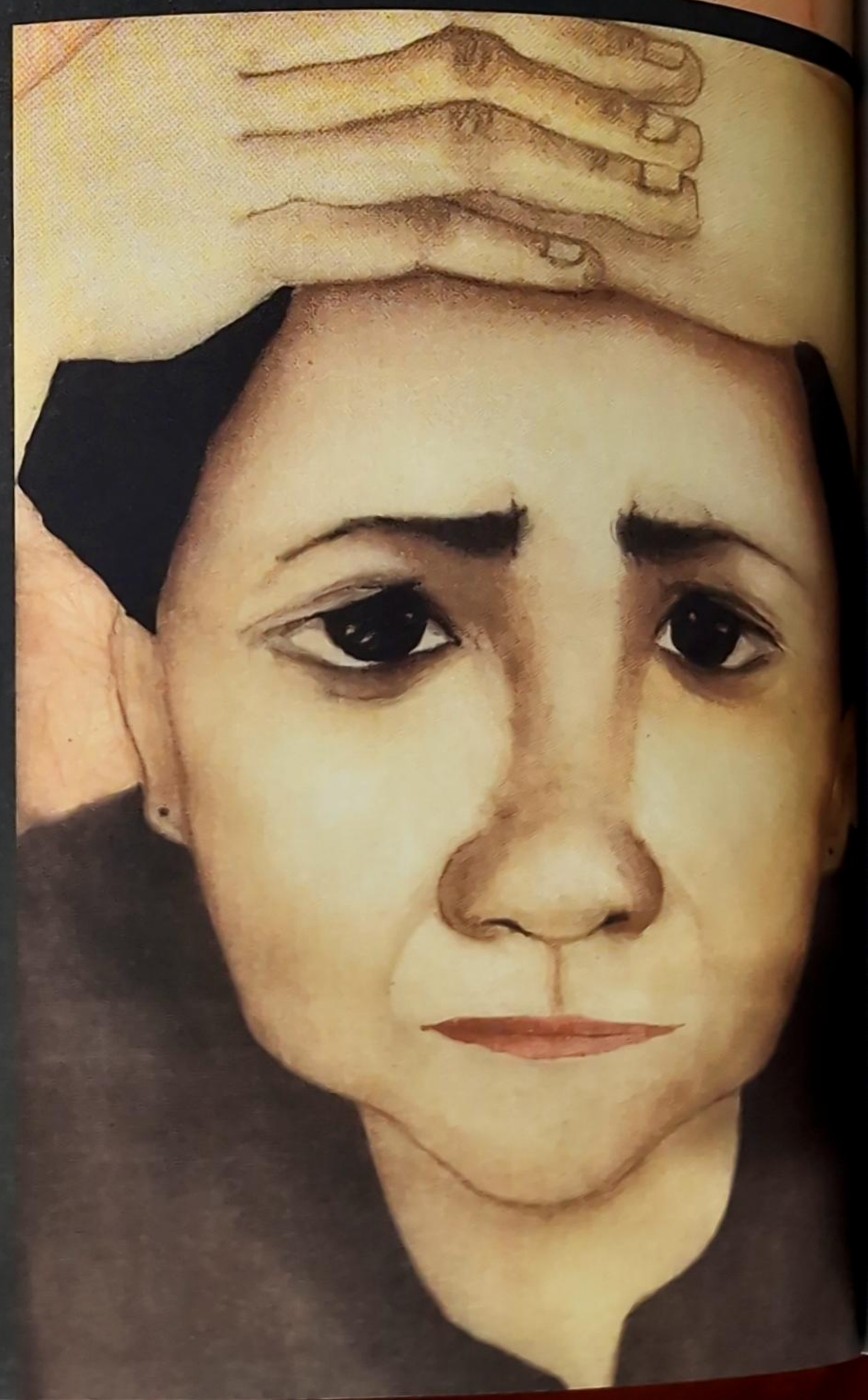
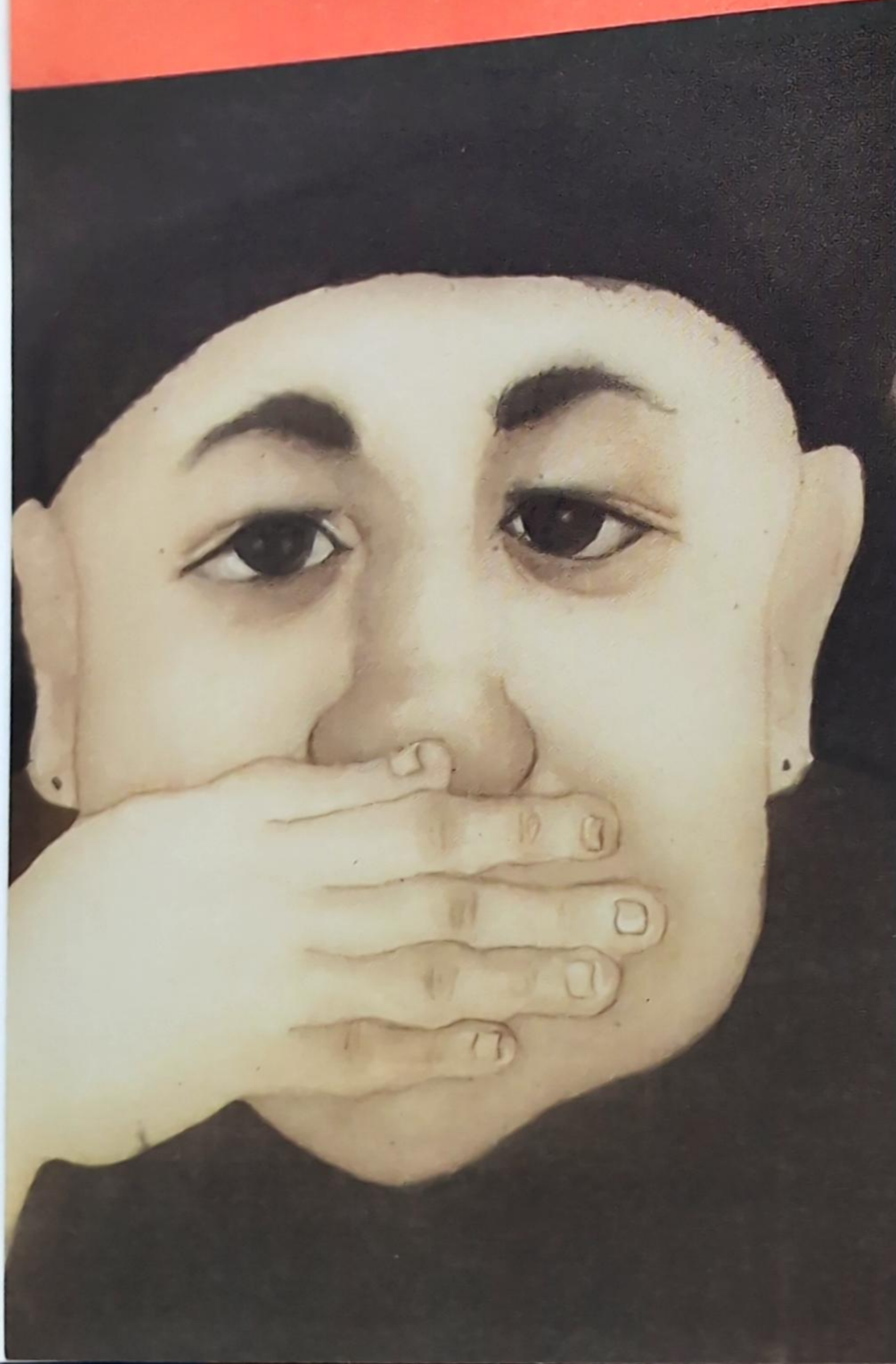
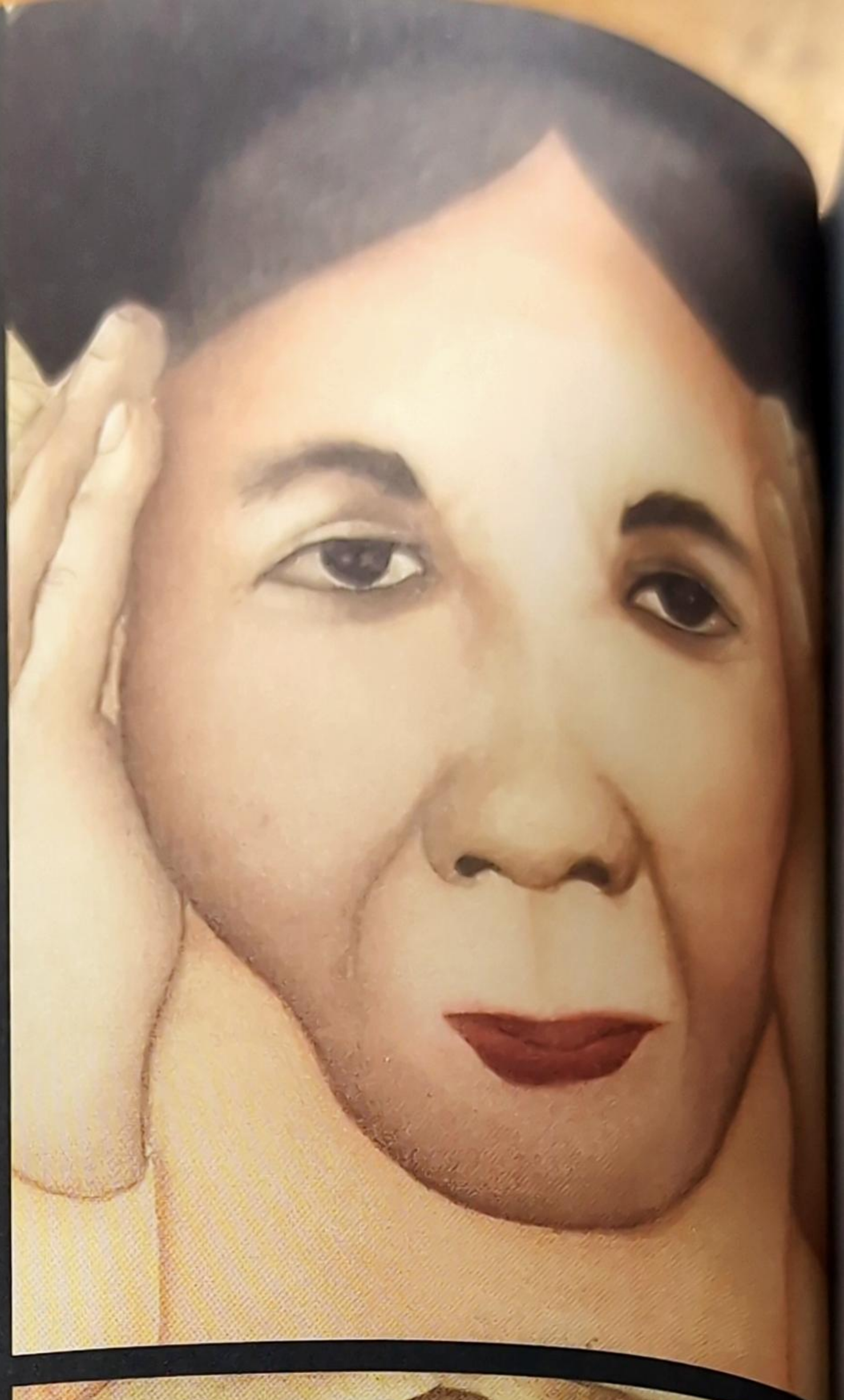
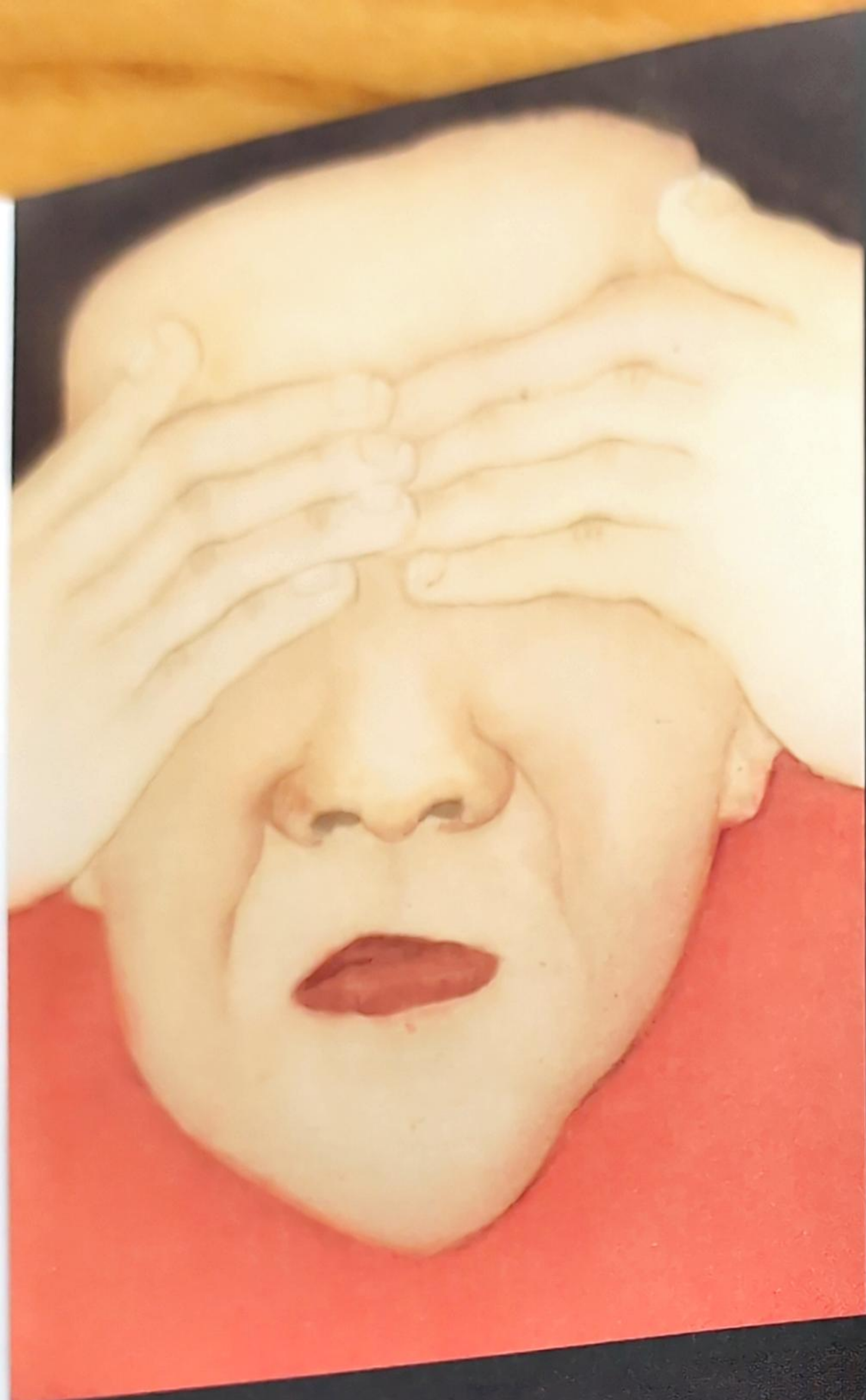
80 x 75 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

A poetic rendering of his own self-portrait, the artist has depicted himself in a realist manner and places the image within a surreal background. There are also recognisable elements in the painting – the moon that references a woman's face that appears in his well-known *Altar* and *Human Face* series of paintings, the colour palette as well as the stylisation in rendering foliage – that have become characteristic of the artist's works of the 1990s. [JF]









Nguyen Thi Chau Giang

To be Happier

2007

Ink and colour on silk

120 x 80 cm each, set of four paintings

Witness collection

Giang is often referred to as the "Frieda Kahlo of Vietnam" because of the way she painted as well as the subject matter of her work. Her oil paintings reflect her innermost feelings and struggle as a woman in relation to her family, husband and children. Recently, she started experimenting in the silk medium where her imagery is much softer and poetic, perhaps due to the inherent characteristics of silk painting. These four works are fine examples of her accomplishment where their strength lies in the intricate treatment of the womens' faces. They are deliberately placed in a confined space and given specific expressions and gestures, to which the artist remarks: "And one day, I woke up in the sunset when I heard a blue bird which was singing out of the window. I saw above the wide sky and understood that, to be happier, it is better not to see too much, talk too much, hear too much and try not to think too much." [JF]



Phan Cam Thuong

The Village

2001

Watercolour on silk

80 x 200 cm

Collection of the artist

Thuong's singular interest in the depiction of village life is exemplified in this silk painting. He explained that this work was produced to celebrate the birth of the child of his old friend and mentor, Nguyen Quan. Here, Quan is seen carrying his child protectively in his arms while well-wishing family, relatives and friends gather around him. The subject of this painting is also reflective of Thuong's interest in pre-destined human relationships that he regards as a fundamental matter in life. [JF]







Tran Hoang Co

Houses

Bronze

36 x 13 x 13 cm each, set of three sculptures

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Co's *Houses* are delicate edifices. Balanced on spindly legs and beams, these precarious structures seem to warp and bend in different directions. Within each of their structures, a vague human-like stick figure is suggested in a unique sculptural representation that can best be said to resemble a sketch. These works recall the spare, Surrealist sculptures of Alberto Giacometti. They are at once enigmatic and poignant, their fragile structures suggestive of impermanence and transience. [TSL]

Le Thiet Cuong
The Changing Eye
1997

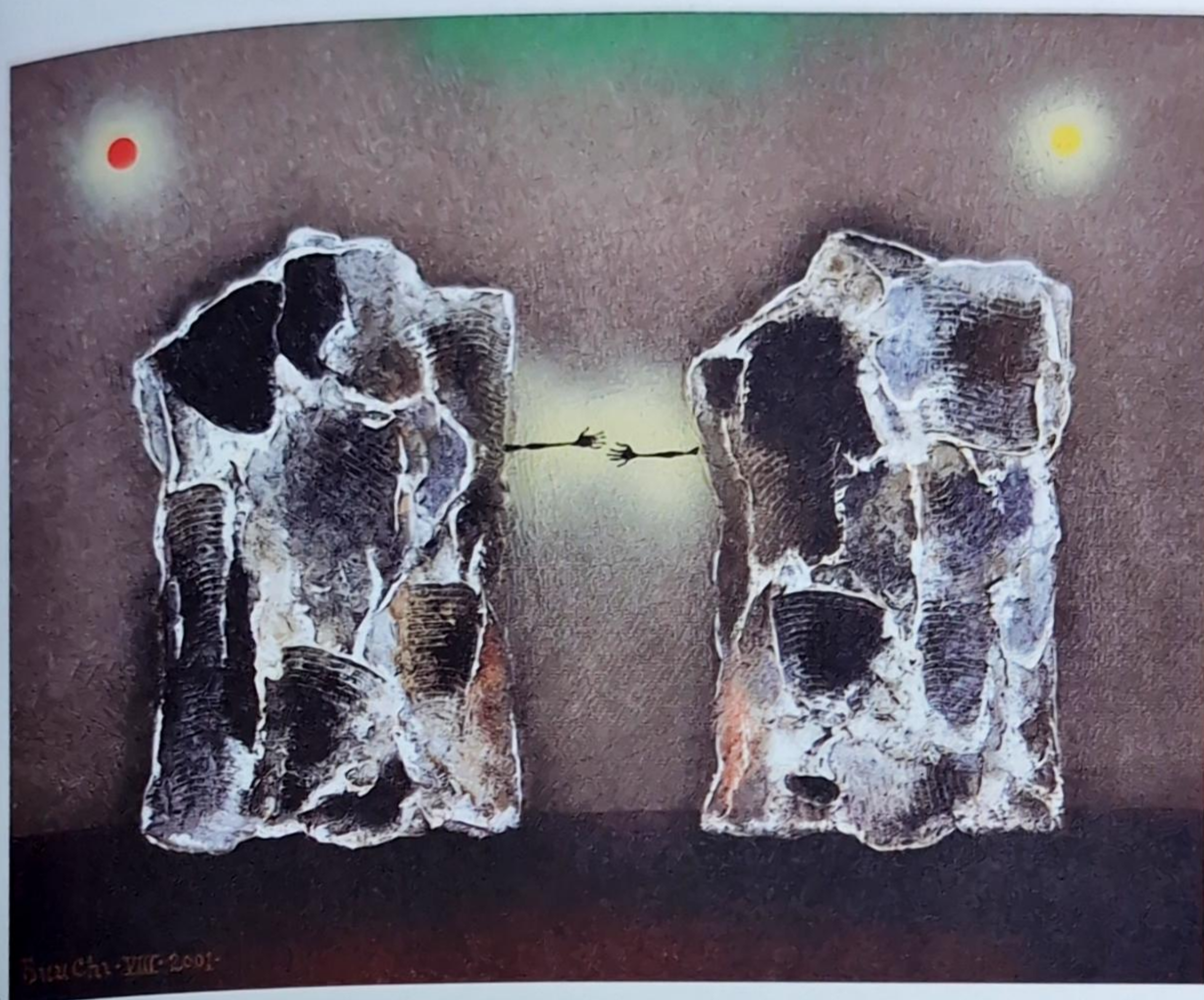
Oil on canvas
196 x 156 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

*The eye is the symbol of one's point of view.
When I say "changing view", or "changing eye",
I mean one must change the way one
looks at things in order to have a new outlook*

This painting was part of the artist's solo exhibition hosted by Plum Blossoms Gallery in Hong Kong and Singapore. Cuong is greatly admired for the simplicity in his renderings that are inspired by Buddhist teachings and Vietnamese traditions in art. Here, he responds to the impending changes as Vietnam progresses and develops into a striving economy. It is the artist's hope that his fellow countrymen will not lose sight of their purpose in life in the midst of accumulating material wealth. [JF]





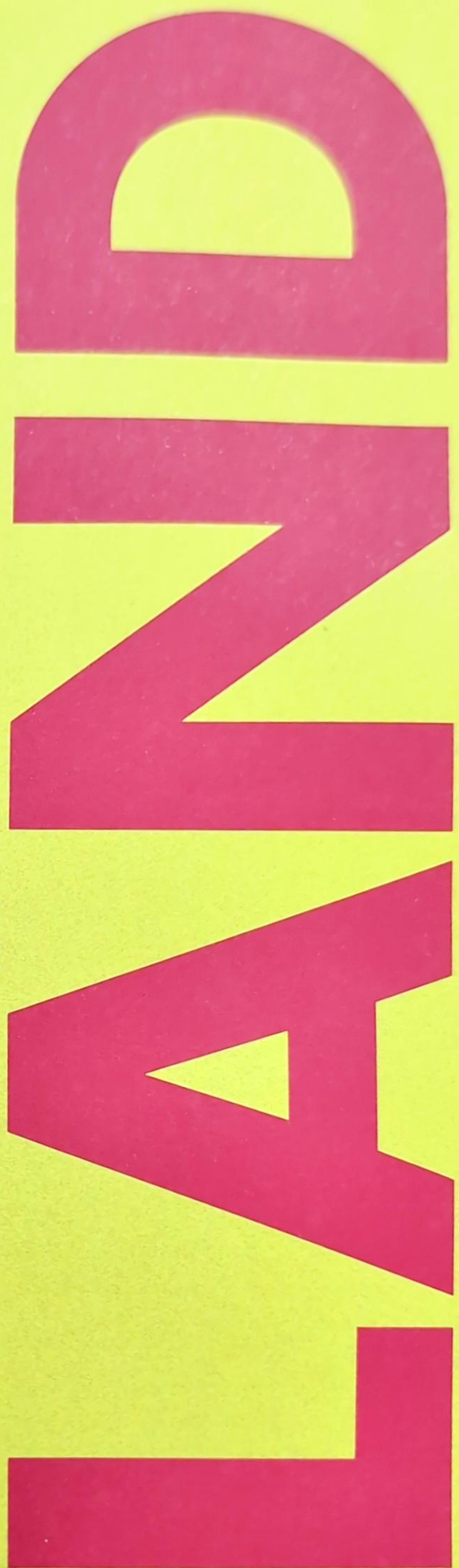


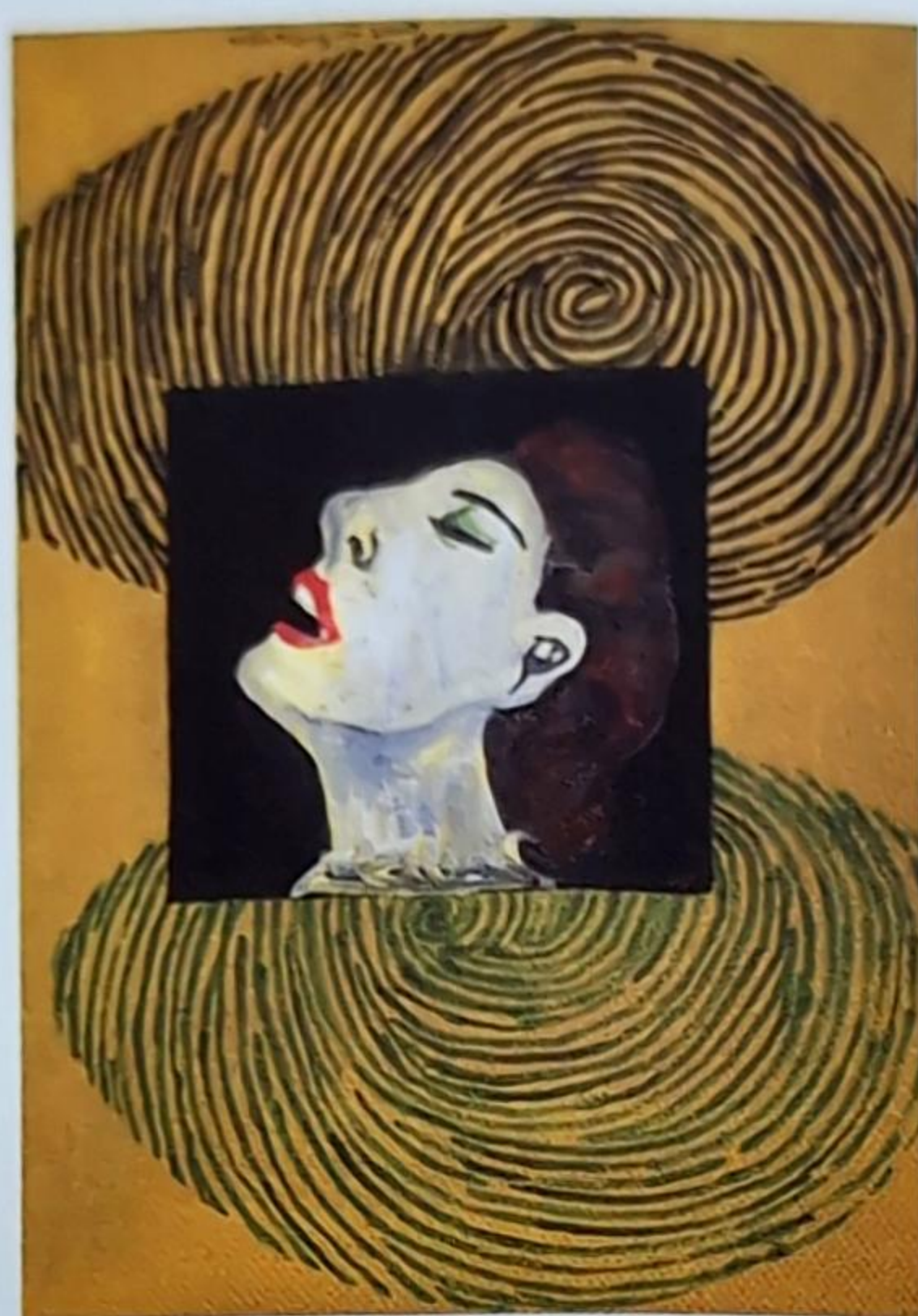
Buu Chi
Searching for One Another
 2001
 Oil on paper
 80 x 100 cm
 Collection of Bill A. Manson

This painting was produced a year before Chi's demise. The symbolism of the sun and full moon reveals his interest in Eastern philosophy of *yin* and *yang* while its stylistic depiction, his integration of Western pictorial idiom of surrealism with Vietnamese sensibilities. The painting is also imbued with a strong sense of longing and desire that reflects the harsh realities in life. [PF]

The exploration of the land as a subject matter in Vietnamese art is strongly linked to the question of identity and what is considered "Vietnamese" in its expression. Painting the streets of the city or iconic structures in the landscape, artists working in these genres – both in the realist and abstract mode – hold on to the belief that their art reflects their nature or the essence of being Vietnamese. Through their renderings, the attempt to evoke emotional ties to the places portrayed is evident. The concern with the city or urban spaces has however in the recent years gone beyond mere physical appearances. The meaning, significance and symbolism of the city is a fast emerging theme in current Vietnamese art practices. Artists are beginning to explore the narrative potential of the city's structure and its architecture to convey what it means to live within it as well as using it as a social commentary on the impact of economic advancement and the

erasure of the past through the inevitable urban renewal process. This concern is exemplified by works that reflect the artists' feeling towards the changes in both the social and economic spheres that have taken place over the past two decades since the implementation of *Doi Moi*. This may be communicated through the use of metaphors or as seen in the documentary on the *Cyclo Project*, the embarking of a community project in an attempt to initiate a change in the mindset of the riders.





Tran Trong Vu

Rainwater Even Though Salty is not Speechless

2000

Oil on canvas

120 x 80 cm each, set of three panels

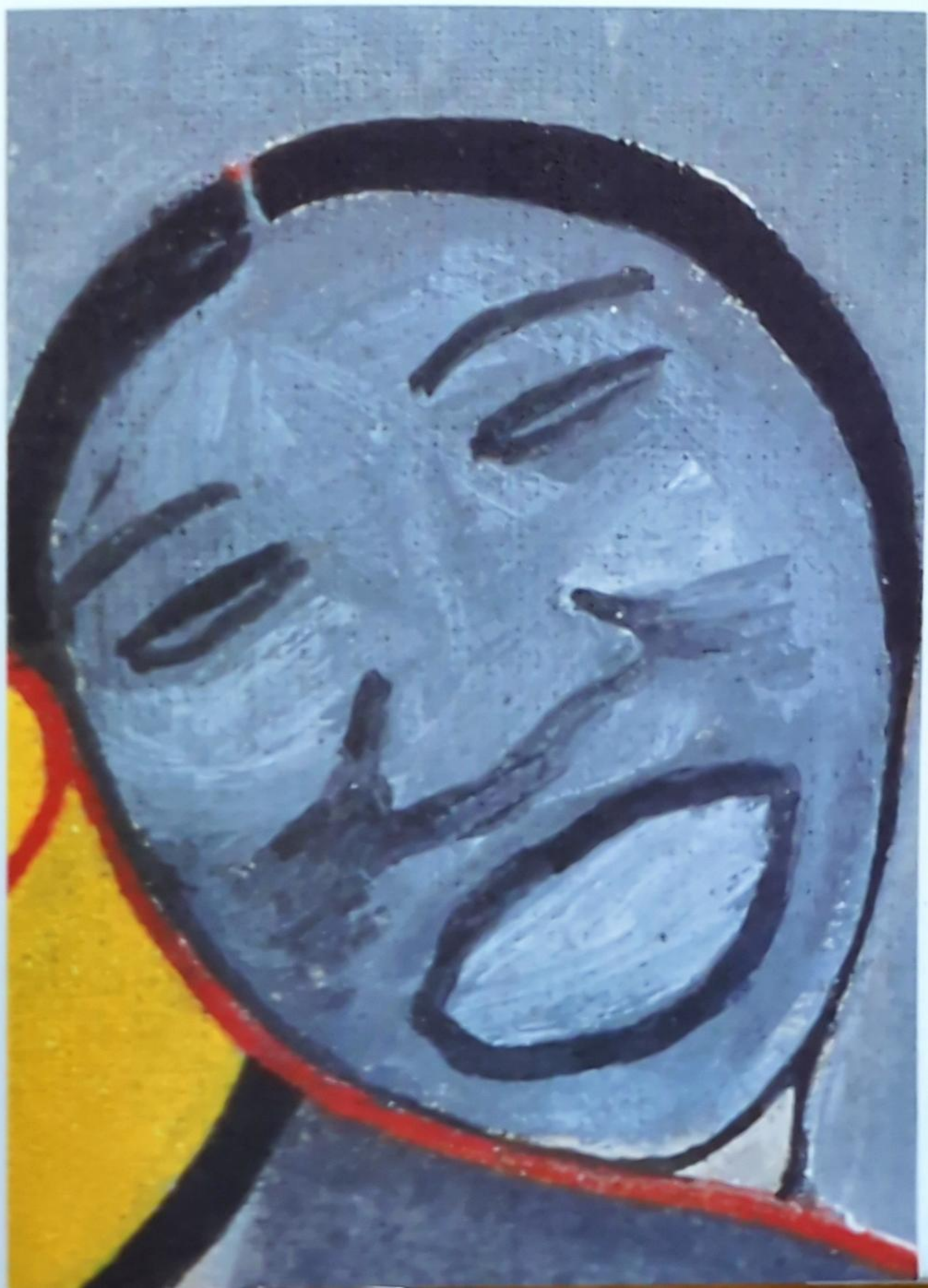
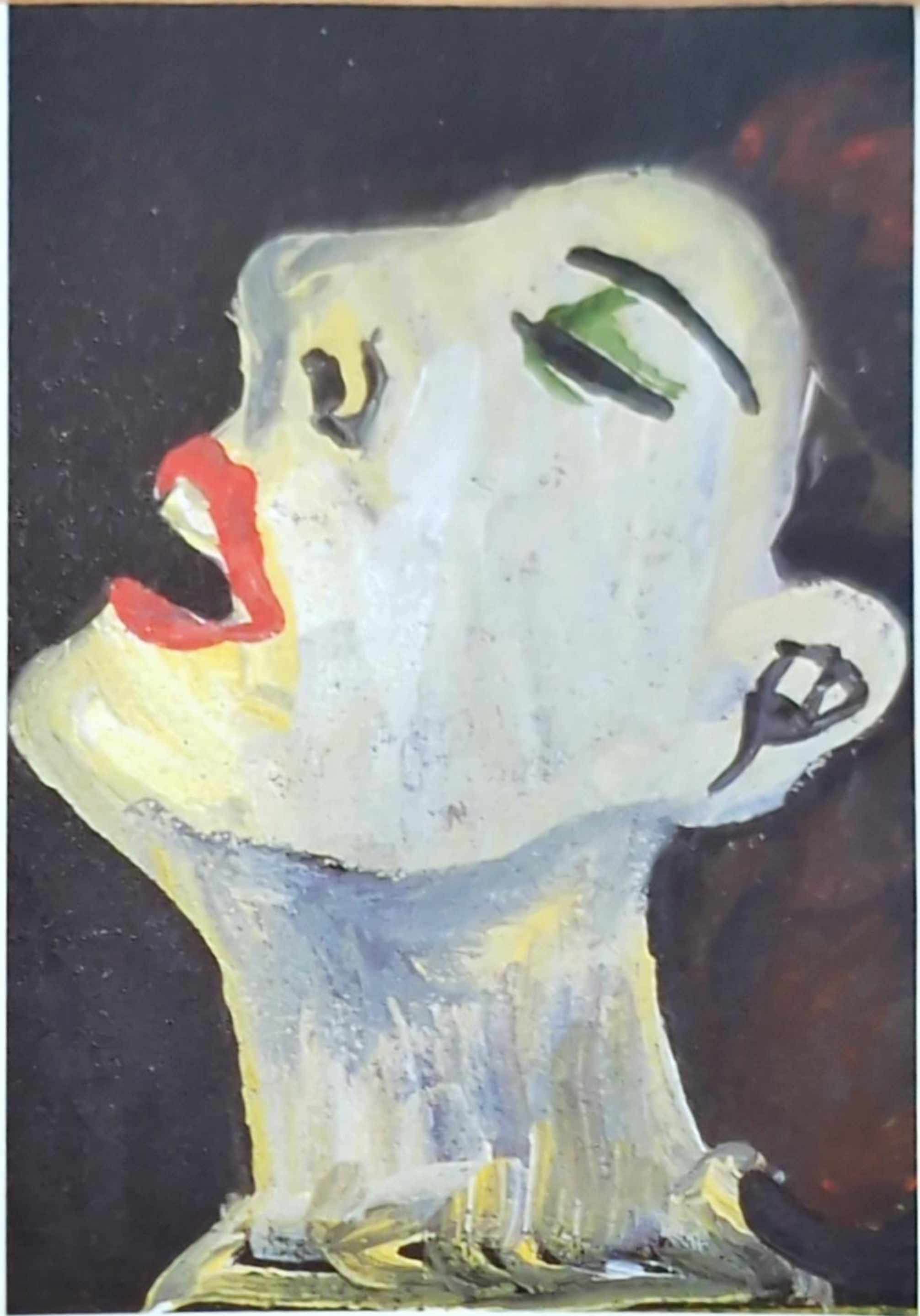
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

First shown in the exhibition, *Encounter with the Rain*, in Hanoi, this triptych reveals Vu's introspection of Vietnamese society and its people. The text in this work is translated as follows:

Rainwater even though it is salty, it is not romantic

Rainwater even though it is salty, it is not speechless

Vu is using "rainwater" as a metaphor for the tears of the masses and is also in reference to his father's radical poetry (Tran Dan, 1926, Nam Dinh – 1997, Hanoi) in which rain is an occurring motif. Each of the panel suggests human suffering and monotony of everyday life hidden behind the half-smiles of the figures, pointing at the loss of identity and conformity brought about by an increasingly globalised environment. [JF&PL]







Dinh Thi Tham Poong

Born

1996

Watercolour on *do* paper

60 x 40 each, suite of six paintings

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

The artist embraces a philosophy that views every being as having a dichotomous existence. As exemplified in this series of paintings, the human being takes on both an animal and vegetal existence, the entities intertwined and subsisting harmoniously. Poong uses the leaves of the banana plant as a symbol of her ethnic identity as the plant is native to the hills region in the north where she grew up. [JF]

Do Duy Tuan
Combination

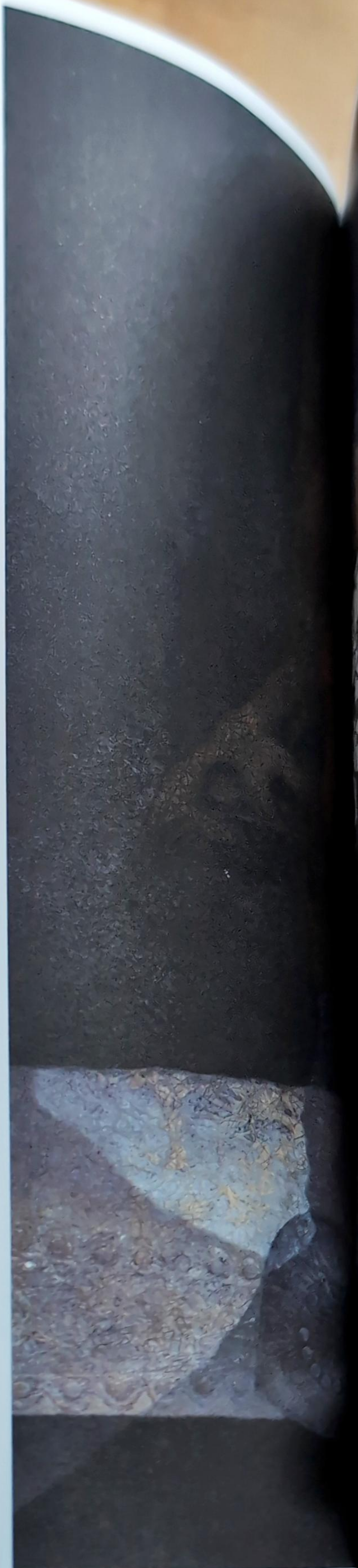
2001

Mixed media on canvas

200 x 200 cm

Collection of Fine Arts Museum of Ho Chi Minh City

Combination explores the relationship between human and nature, between the earthly identity and the divine. The painting expresses the balance between the influence of the higher natural forces and the simple human needs in a complex everyday environment. The artist said, "My art embraces the nostalgic and romantic ambience of Hue, of the glorious past, and of the divine, dream-like beauty that I have yet to reconcile with today's civilisation." [PL]







Do Ky Huy

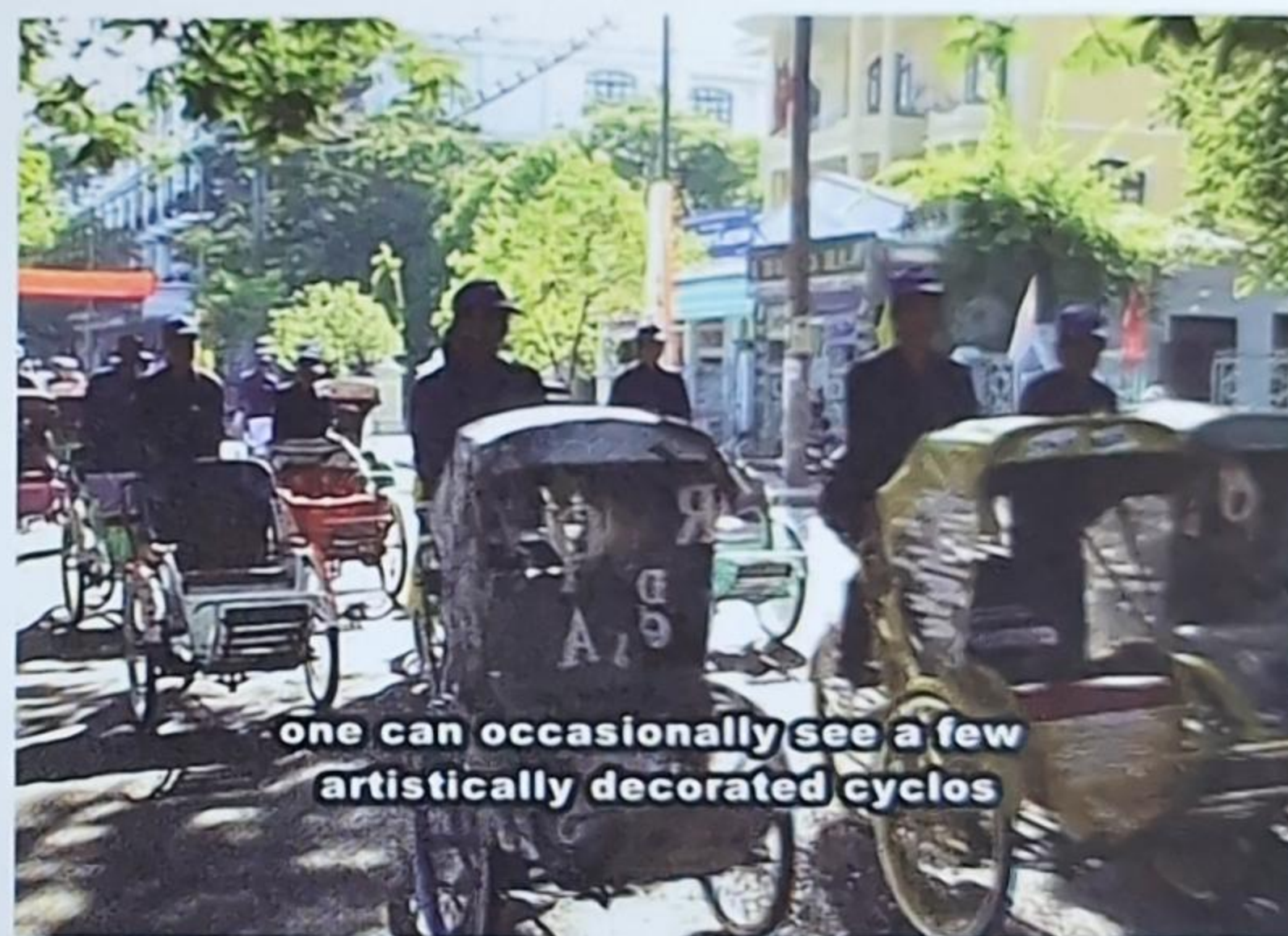
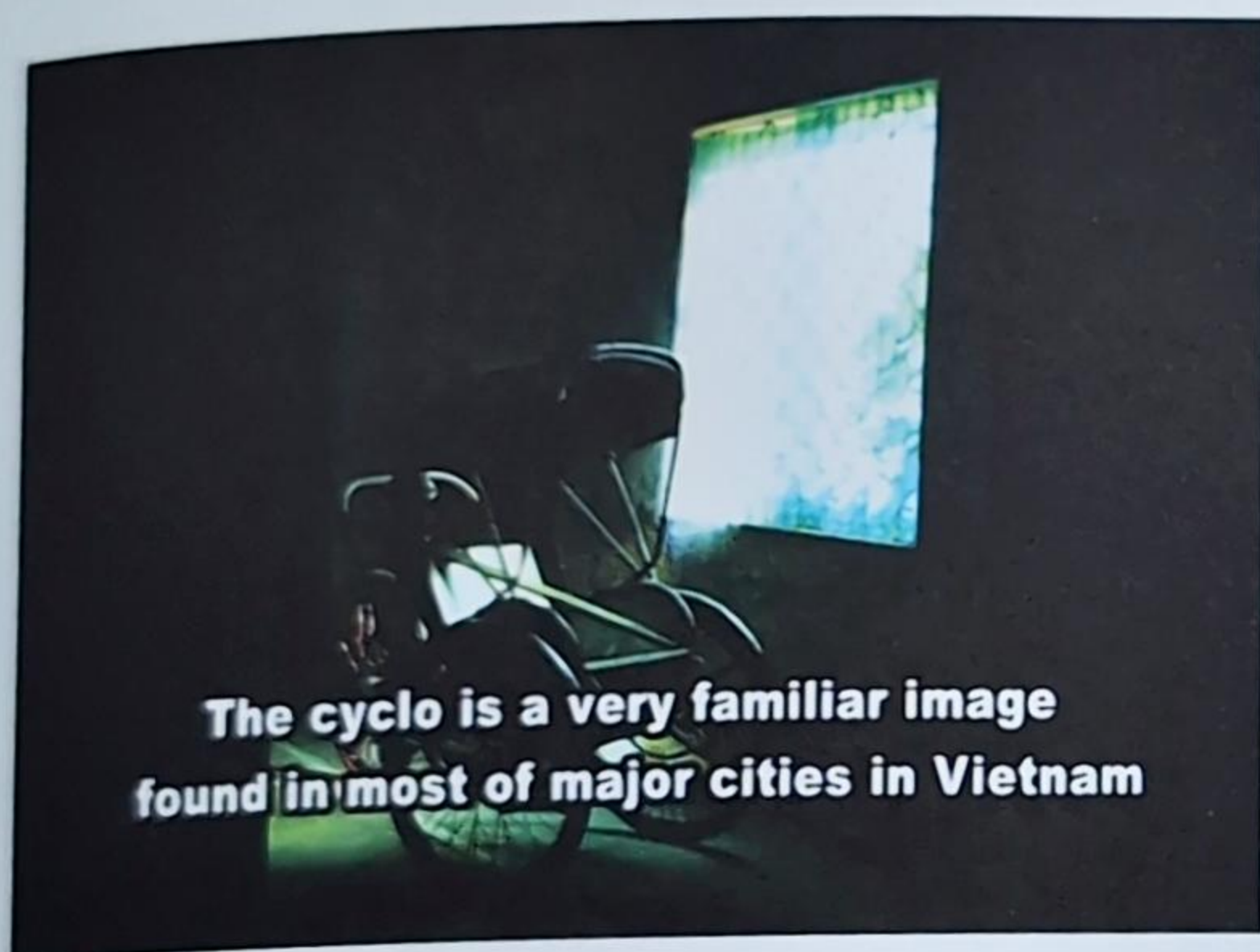
Cyclo Project

2007

Video documentation

Courtesy of the artist

While a number of artists working in Vietnam today produce art that makes social commentary or which engages with society in some way, few have done so with as much directness as Huy. In 2007, Hue-based artist Huy, along with several other artists of the *Commart Collective*, undertook a project to bring art to the masses. Mobilising the city's cyclo drivers and university art students, the collective undertook to design and decorate a fleet of cyclos (rickshaws), in order to introduce the idea of aesthetics to a group of people who otherwise would have no opportunity to experience art in their menial, everyday lives. Their efforts culminated in a parade of the decorated cyclos, literally bringing art to the city streets. His initiative in taking art and artistic practices out of the traditional confines of the museum and gallery, and in turn bringing it to the common folk, marks an important attempt by contemporary Vietnamese artists to practise a socially-engaged art, in particular one that has a direct impact on the local community. This challenges the traditional notion that art is produced by and for the elite, and is inaccessible to those who lack the appropriate resources, education and upbringing. [TSL]



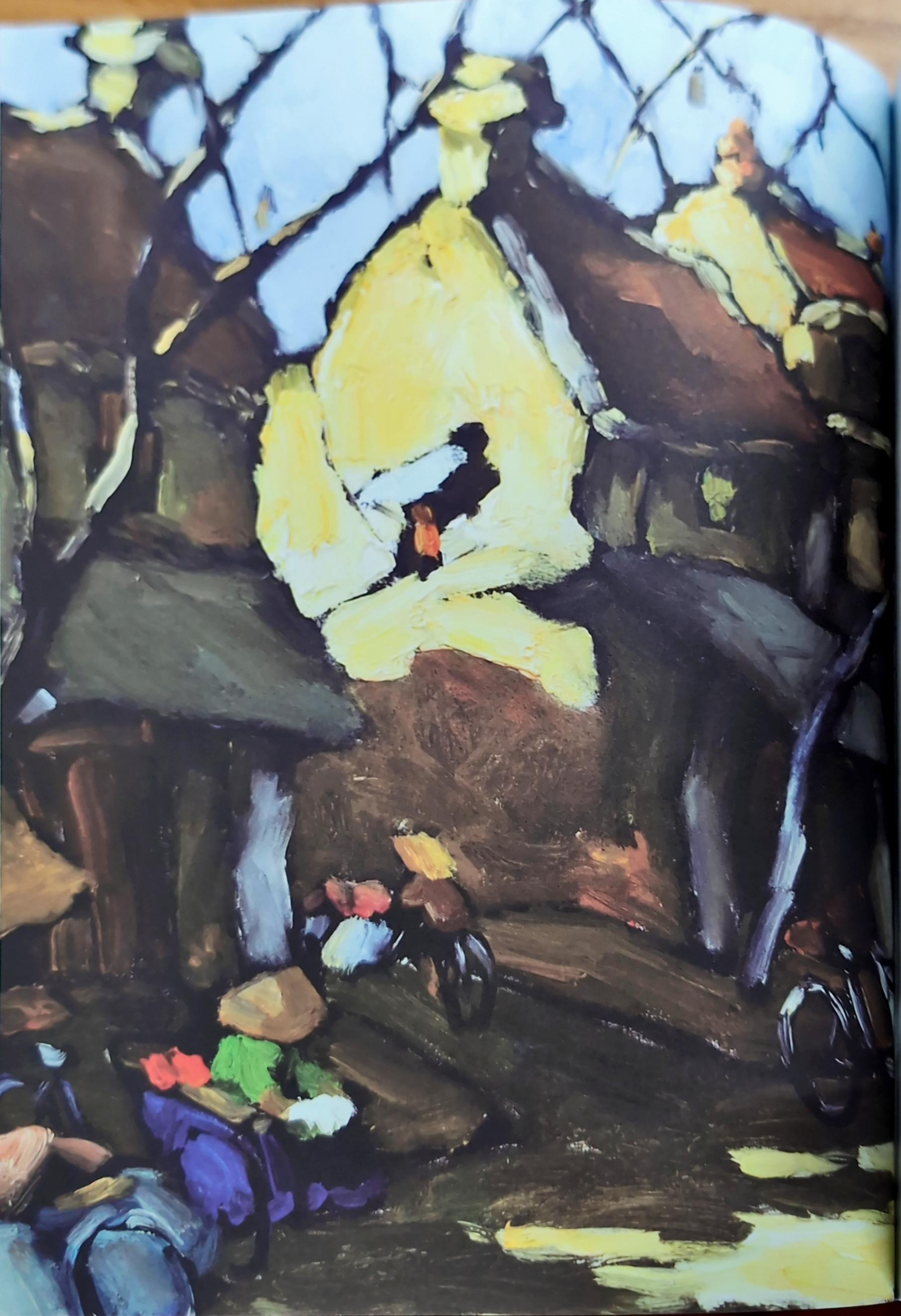
Do Thi Ninh
Thay Pagoda
1993

Lacquer on board
90 x 110 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Ninh's painting aims to depict the soul of Vietnam which "is more alive in the village than in the city". Cultural identity is expressed here through choice of a well-known pagoda. Painted in a naive style, using black outlines and primary tints of lacquer, the pagoda, depicted with undulating lines, is also a way for the artist to experiment with harmonies between colours and shapes. Besides lacquer, natural elements such as eggshells are incorporated into the artwork. [PL]









Le Thanh Son
An Old Street in Hanoi
 1998
 Oil on canvas
 93 x 103 cm
 Collection of Toh Hock Ghim

Luan's interest in the light sees him capturing the spirit of the place in different seasons. In this depiction, the soft autumn light reflecting off the changing colours of the leaves gives this street in the city of Hanoi a romantic feeling bordering on sentiment and nostalgia. Luan is known to evoke such emotions for the city through his deliberate choice of subject matter and colour palette. [JF]

Nguyen Nhu Y

Sculpture Installation

1999

Wood

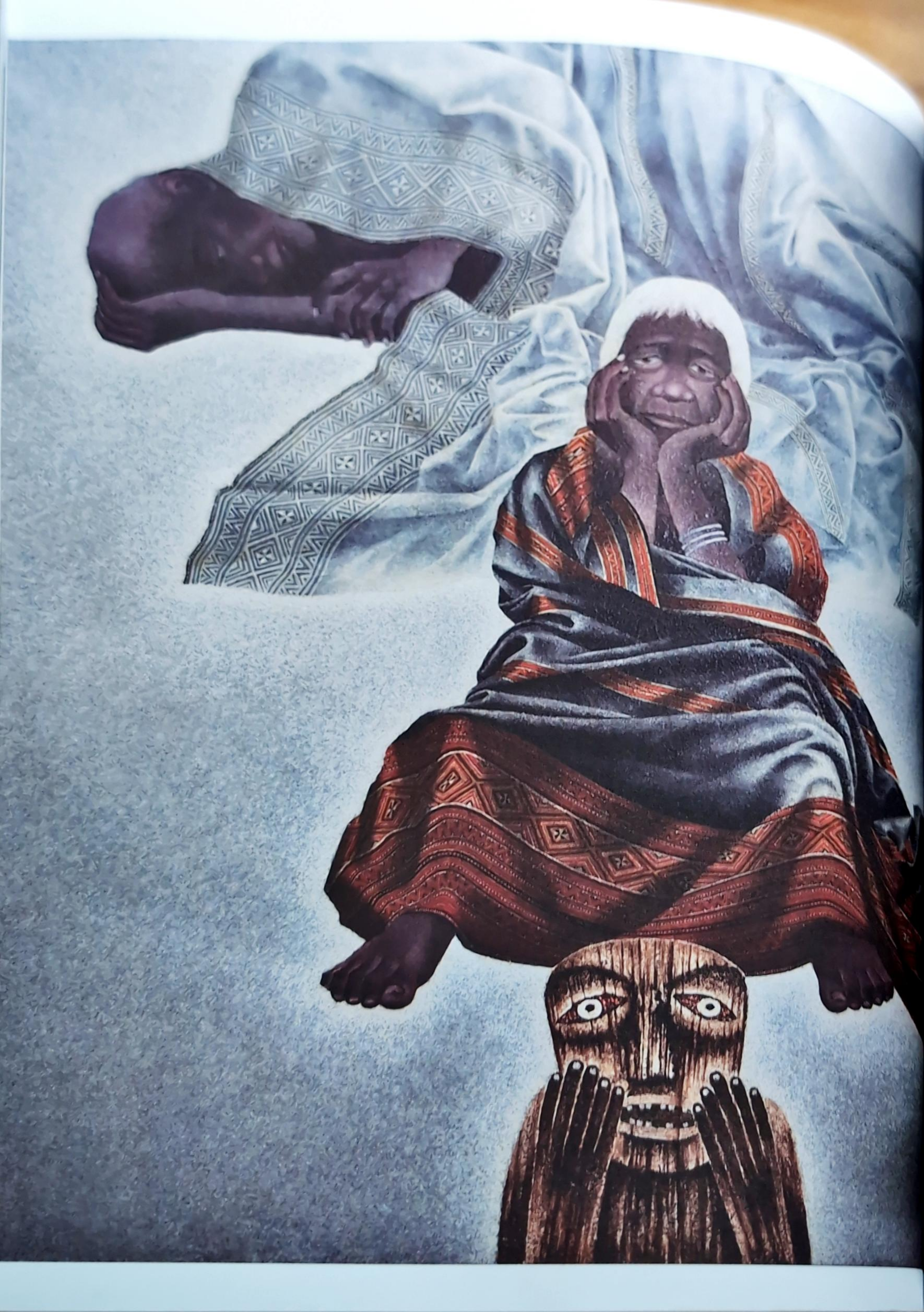
Variable dimensions

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

A singular and eccentric figure, Y carves wood with deft virtuosity. His sculptures are totemic effigies, inspired by the primitive sculpture of the Gia Rai ethnic minority, who live in the high plateaus of Central Vietnam. Nguyen Nhu Y is a prodigious worker, choosing to carve his wood directly without any preparatory sketches. He shapes rough pieces of wood into wiry forms whose primitive appearance belie the artistic skill that goes into their making. The sculptures are remarkably tactile, and their knotted, whorled shapes bear the mark of the artist's hand on each and every line. [TSJ]









Nguyen Thanh Son
Innermost Feeling

2004

Oil on canvas

200x 200 cm

Collection of Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts, Hanoi

This enigmatic painting is typical of Thanh Son's works where the living and the dead are depicted living harmoniously together. The totem figure shown at the bottom of the painting is a common object found in villages of the Western highlands. Life-size, these totems can be found among the spirit houses, usually as hollowed-out logs that are half buried in the ground next to the family house. [JF]



Nguyen Trung (1940, Soc Trang province)

Untitled

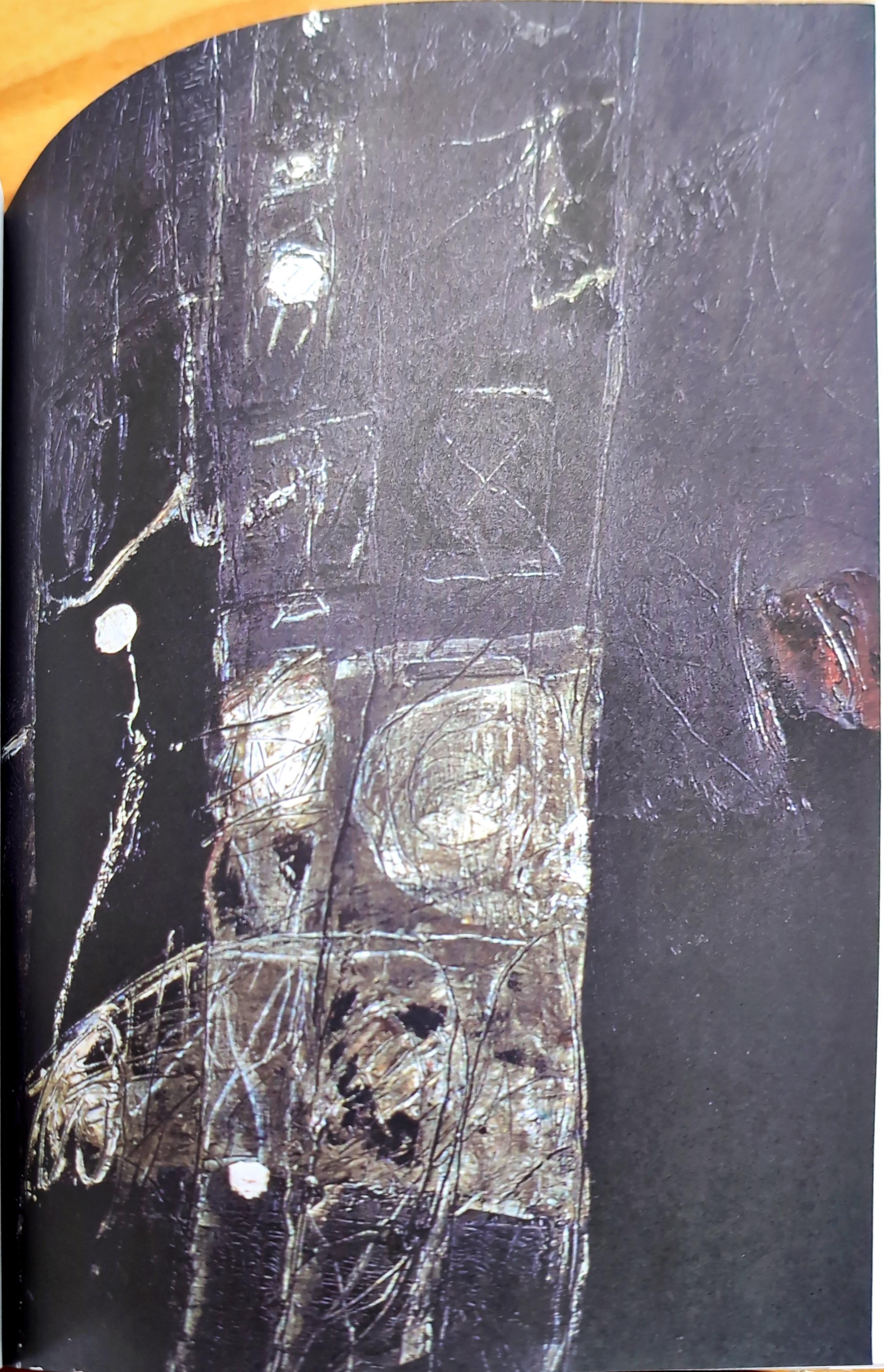
1994

Oil and acrylic on canvas

130 x 130 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Untitled is part of a series of paintings that focuses on old buildings in Ho Chi Minh City. For Trung, the "painting evokes my nostalgic feelings towards those old architectures where men, women and children, through the ages, were living, together with their ancestors' souls, hand prints and voices' echo... Each of these houses had its own character, its own soul and substance. But we destroyed them to build new ones, skyscrapers, which transform the land into a modern city". [PL]







Nguyen Trung

Mossy Rock

1993

Oil on canvas

130 x 130 cm

Collection of Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts, Hanoi

The artist introduces the viewer to his own vision of the inner light which emanates from a pagoda. Through a play of light and shadow, the painting suggests an interior punctuated by sunlight streaming in through the slits in the wooden walls. A sense of the mystical and spiritual evokes and reinforces "the nostalgia for the old ... architecture of the past." The painting is inspired by the visits the artist made as a child with his mother to the pagodas of his native countryside in the Soc Trang province, Mekong Delta. [PL]

Pham An Hai

Summer

1999

Oil on canvas

115 x 135 cm

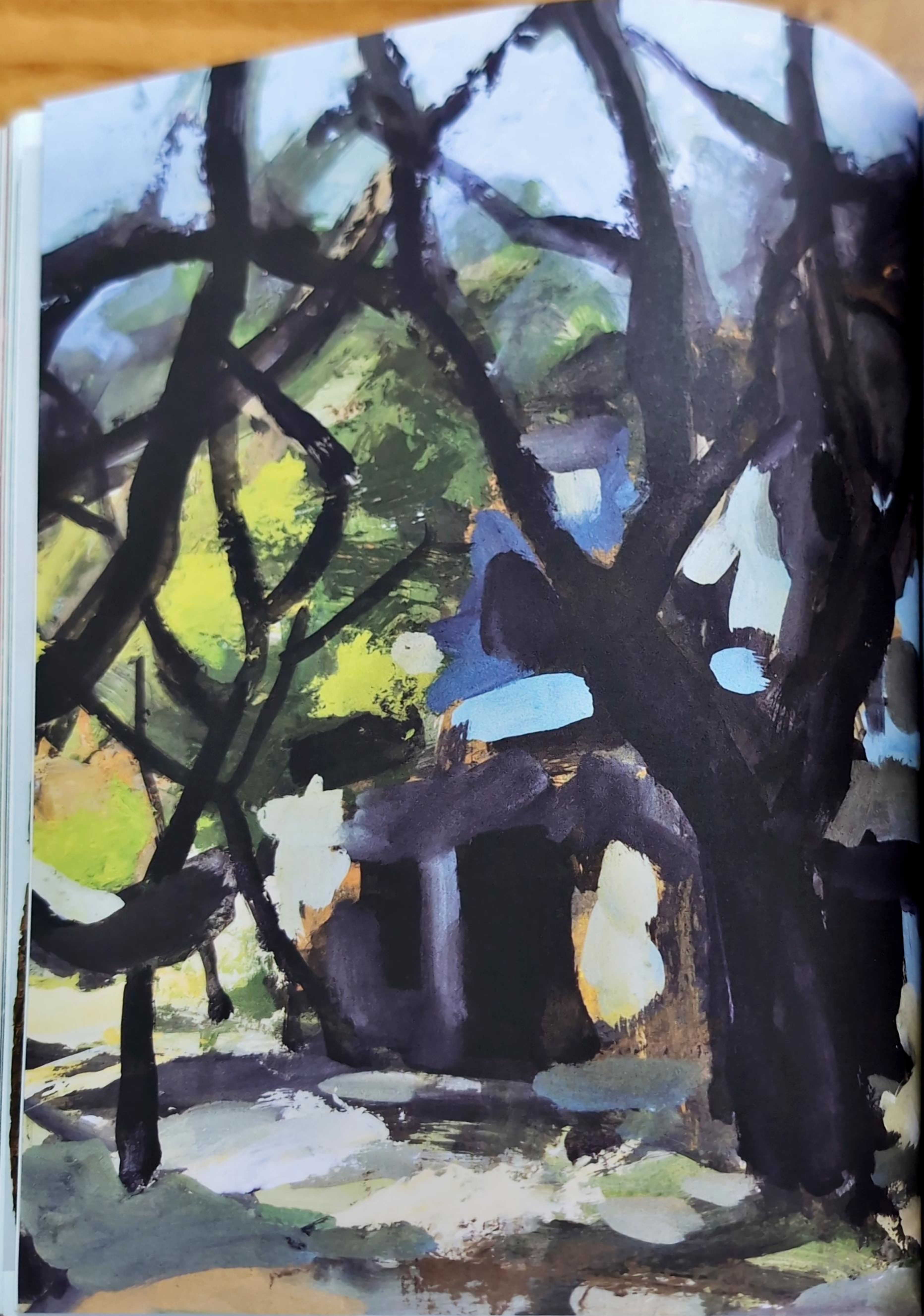
Collection of the artist

This abstract painting is inspired by the streets of Hanoi during the long hot days of summer. The artist attempts to evoke the dynamism of a changing landscape, reflecting the important urban developments taking place in Vietnam. The brushstrokes, strong and spontaneous, sketch the shapes of the architectural forms while the contrasting colours emphasise the outlines of the urban landscape. [PL]





Fahai 99





Pham Luan
Winter in Hanoi
 1994
 Gouache on paper
 80 x 65 cm
 Collection of Toh Hock Ghim

This painting of Luan is a fine example of his early paintings. His interest in the light is strongly evident in the work where he has succeeded in capturing the light of a winter day. He is also well-known for his faithfulness to the subject matter, that is the city of Hanoi, that he continues to paint till today. Here in this painting, the boldness in line and the gestural brushstrokes that are his signature's marks, can be observed. [JF]

Tran Luu Hau

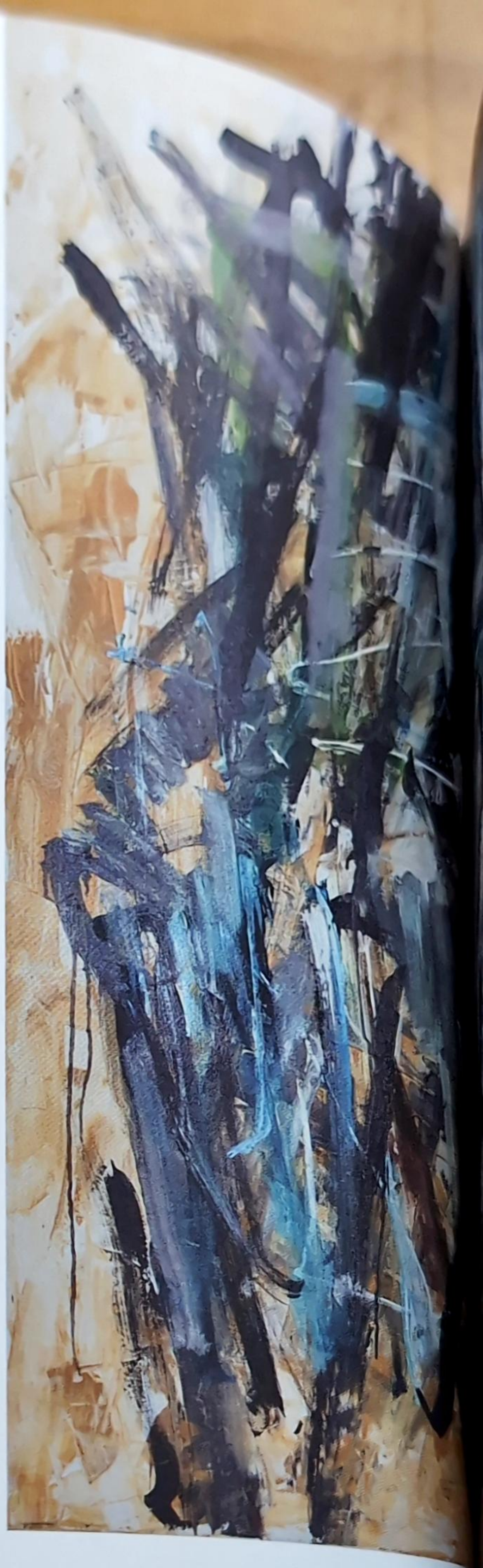
Cliff

1999

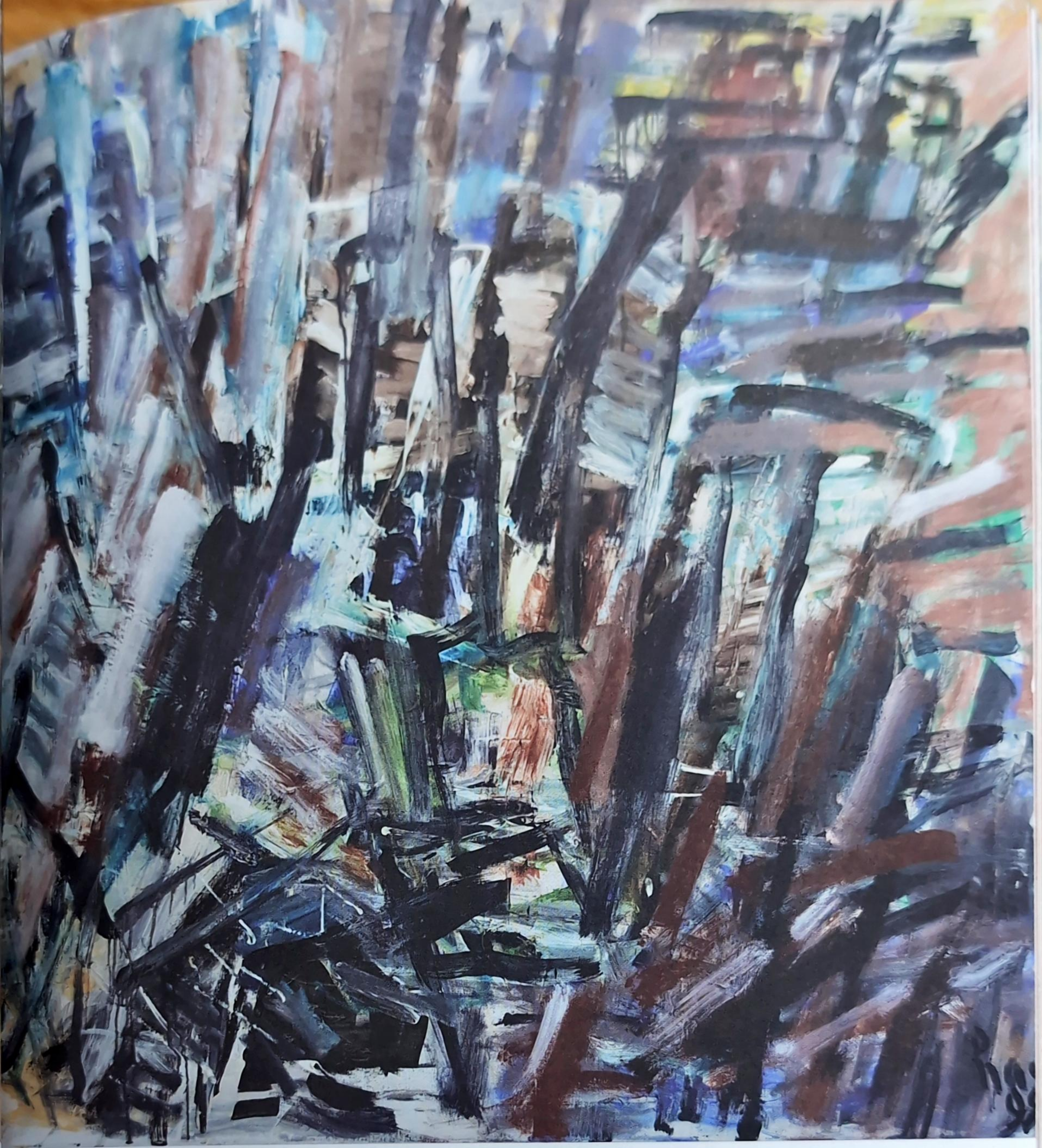
Acrylic on canvas

150 x 200 cm

Collection of Mr and Mrs Lim Theow Beng



This abstract expressionist painting is one of eight large canvases that Hau produced in 1999. In this particular painting, the powerful and gestural brush strokes reveal the tremendous energy and virtuosity of the artist as he sets out to tackle one of his favourite subjects – landscape. Hau has with much deliberation in this instance, chosen the non-objective or abstract approach with an emphasis on colour over a representative style. [JF&PL]





Hong Viet Dung
Meditative Monk
Oil on canvas
155 x 155 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Dung has forged new directions in modern Vietnamese art through his meditative paintings. As an antithesis to the Vietnamese's general love for strong colours, Dung has instead used a very subtle colour palette, keeping details to a minimal and giving the canvases a sense of spirituality. Not surprisingly, Dung is a devout Buddhist and this has a profound influence in his approach whereby he focuses on a singular figure that is contained within a vast space. His favourite subject is that of a monk which he often depicts full length as seen in this painting, with the application of orange and browns, reflective of the colour of the figure's robes. [JF]



Hoang Duong Cam

Bis Bis Elephant

2006

Two-channel video

Collection of the artist

Cam's two-channel video projection explores issues of ambiguity inherent in our modern society. His video *Elephant* references the fable of four blind men who could not agree on what an elephant looks like because they know it only as fragments of a whole and not the sum of its parts. Cam sees this as a metaphor for society's apprehension of the dilemmas and conflicts thrown up by rapid economic development, but he chooses to deal with this in a humorous way. His other video *Bis Bis* is a repetitious loop of traffic on a street. Cam has likened the feeling conveyed by the images in this video to empty applause or a token encore, where the audience applauds and the performers come on stage to take their bow, hence leading to more applause and more curtain calls repeated ad infinitum with no real sense of closure. The sense of inescapable monotony in this video and the jerkiness of its images impart an element of tension to the more light-hearted projection of the elephant with its gentle, rhythmic swaying. [TSL]



REMINI

Memory and nostalgia are predominant themes found in the modern and contemporary expressions in Vietnamese art. Often these hark back to childhood days when the artists were then growing up during the most intense period of the Vietnam War. With the increased bombing by the Americans in the northern parts of the country, particularly in Hanoi, evacuations were often necessary and the children were rounded up in groups and sent to the rural surroundings outside of the city. Artists growing up in those years painted images based on what they remembered of the time spent in villages. Whereas for the older artists, the years

SCIENCE

following the war were especially difficult and their works often recall the hardships they faced during those times. In their attempt to make sense of the horrors and destruction experienced, they approached the subject subtly with references made to the death of loved ones and to very ordinary and everyday objects that came to be essential to their existence. Besides these paintings, there are also works that reflect on the changes in the society as the economy advances. The slow erosion of long-held traditions and customs and the impending demolition faced by old buildings are some of the concerns highlighted in this section.



Dao Minh Tri

Pushing Away the War

1996

Lacquer on board

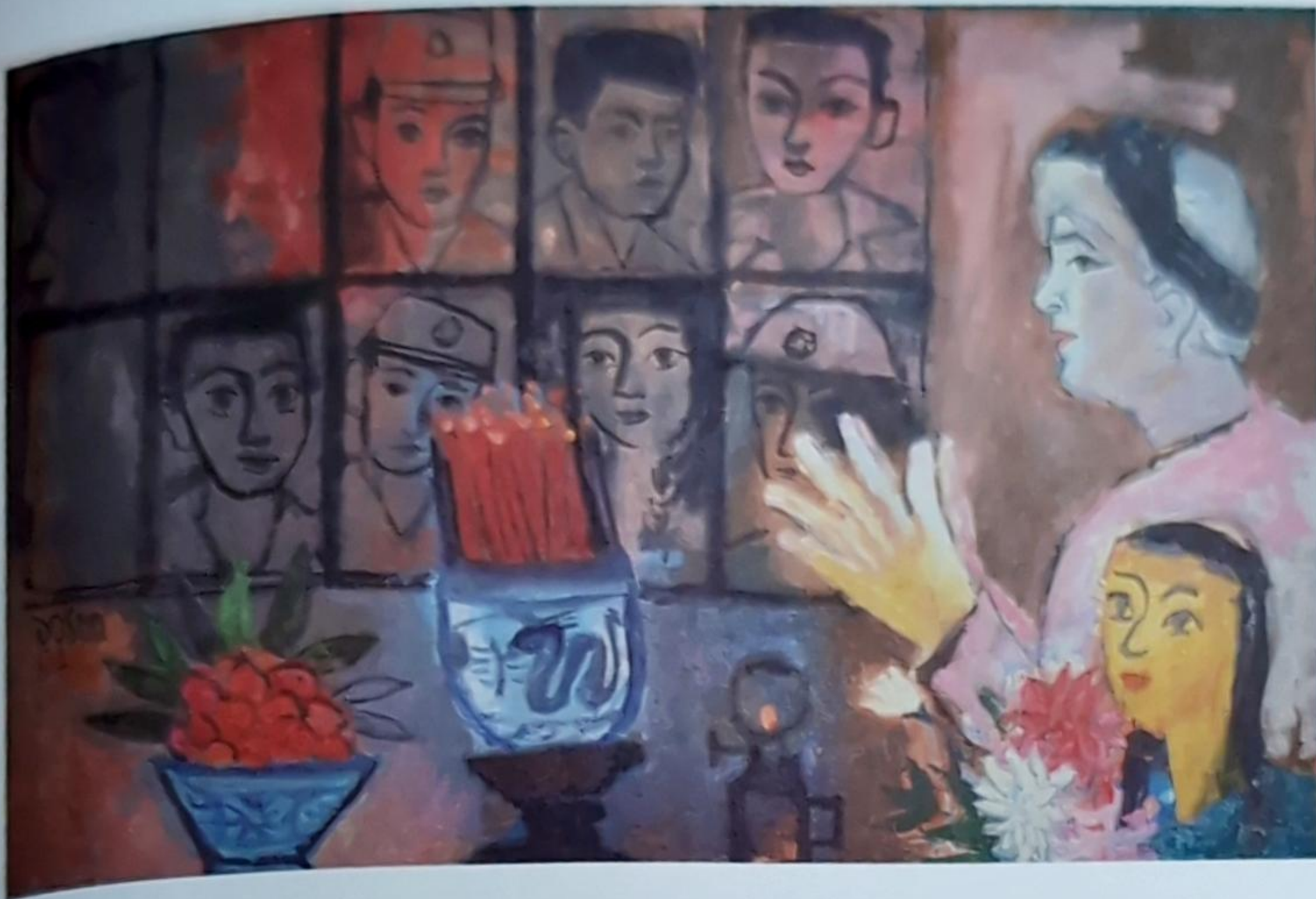
120 x 160 cm each, set of four panels

Collection of the artist

Originally entitled *Ca 5 (Fish 5)*, this lacquer painting is about the horrors of war. Tri in executing this work recalls the widespread destruction that he personally witnessed during the American War. He used abstract forms which spread across the five panels, to allude to a horse-drawn cart that was commonly used to remove dead bodies. The forms are also derived from the shapes of war-torn buildings and the scattered weapons left behind by the dead soldiers. The artist has deliberately used use garish colours here to reflect the anguish and sufferings of war victims, and set the scene under water to suggest the symbolic process of "being washed away over time" or the act of cleansing by water in the effort to bury the dark memories of war years. [JF&PL]







Do Son

Heart of Mother

1994

Oil on canvas

95 x 134 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

The colourful palette and lyricism that Son is known for can be observed in this painting. The deliberate use of pink hues softens the subject matter of the work and deceptively lends a sweet and nostalgic feel to the painting. Here, an elderly woman is offering prayers at her home altar where images of the dead are placed. Three of the figures spotted army uniform where their helmet or caps indicated their military affiliation. We can tell that one of the soldiers, wearing the helmet was a Viet Minh soldier who fought in the Resistance War against the French. Another, a soldier wearing a cap with a star insignia was a Viet Cong soldier from North Vietnam and together with the third, a soldier from the South Vietnam Army fought in the American War period. The remaining portraits are of civilians, two males and one female. In his deliberate selection of people to portray, the artist is advocating the idea of embracing all differences and beliefs in Vietnam's recent history and as a nation, to function as "one people, one history and one country". The artist has also pointedly addressed the loss of an entire generation with the presence of a young girl next to her grandmother who as a figure in the painting symbolises a Motherland that has become wiser through her experiences and sufferings. [JF]

Ha Tri Hieu

Day Singers

1994

Oil on canvas

130 x 140 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

The artist reminisces about his childhood in the countryside in this painting, recalling the times when he was evacuated from Hanoi during the bombing raids in the American war. The time that he spent in the rural villages left such an indelible impression on him that when he painted the life of these people, he felt as if he was reliving those moments. In painting those memories, the size of the human figures echoes the artist's spirit. Hieu's paintings give the feeling of deep nostalgia and admiration that often evoked the terms "bucolic" and "sensual" to describe them. Over the years, subjects like the country singers and cows have become his signature, eternalising the rural past and innocence imbued in the countryside. In seeking to express the Vietnamese rural life, Hieu has found in the village, his own expression and identity. [JF&PL]









Hua Thanh Binh

Traditional Family

1998

Oil on canvas

149 x 199.5 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum - Gift of Mark E Tucker

Known for his figurative works, Binh often paints vestiges from the past by drawing inspiration from Vietnamese customs and traditions. In this work, he has painted three generations of a family. With a painterly approach, he has deliberately depicted the figures in a semi-abstract manner where only their faces bear details while their bodies fade into the background. There is a heightened sense of nostalgia in the work, with the artist commenting on the slow erosion of the old way of life amidst the advancement and progress of the society and economy. [F]

Nguyen Minh Thanh

Earth Blanket

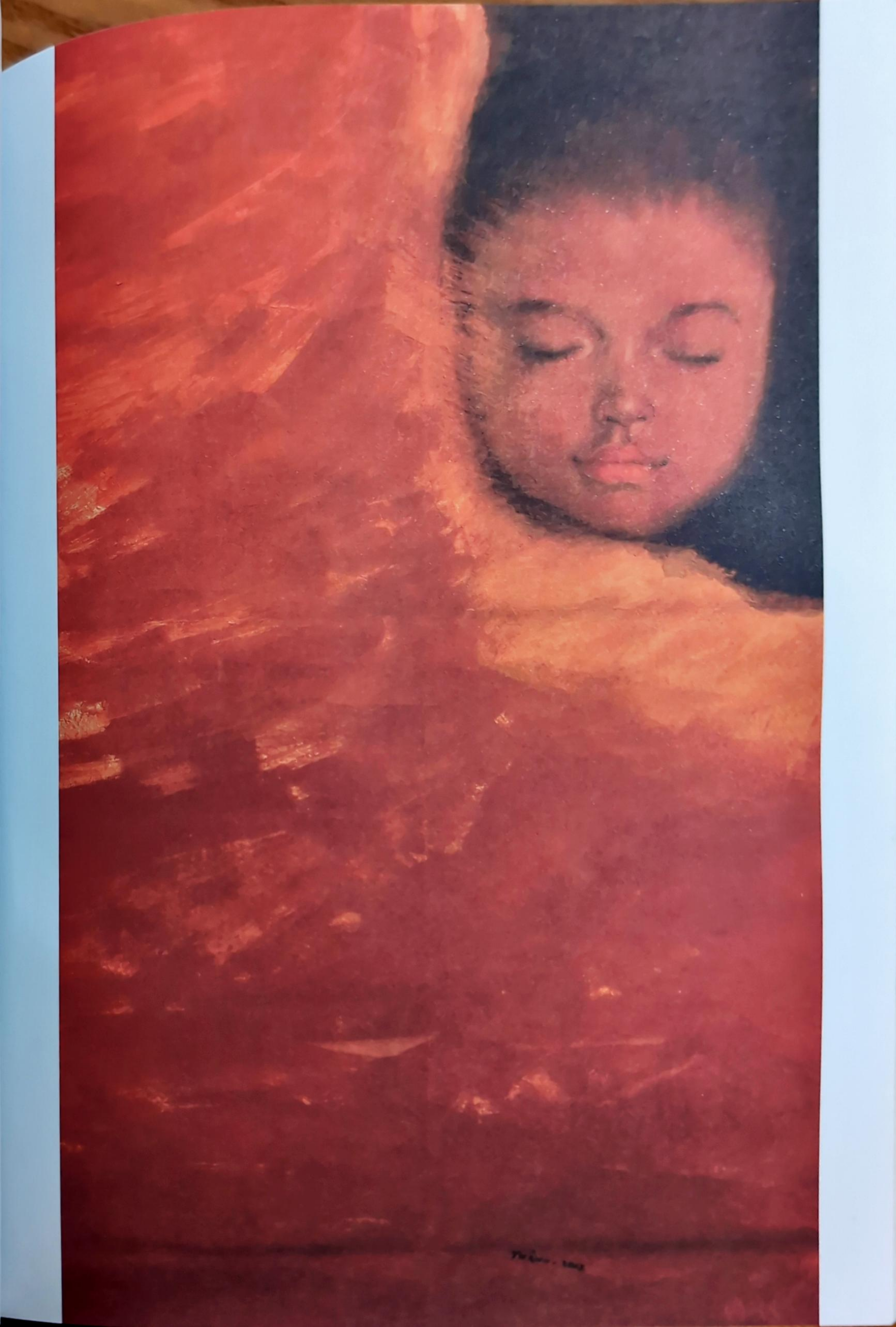
2007

Natural pigments, gouache, watercolour and Chinese ink on *do* paper

75 x 105 cm

Private Collection

In a recent series of works, Thanh uses the image of himself as a child in his continuing quest to examine familial relationships. His works can be seen as a response to Confucian ethics and philosophy that advocate hierarchy and reliance in a highly stratified society. He questions this social collective mentality against the individual and personal self. By using the face of a child, he wants to show what it is to be a member of a family or in a society and to emphasise on the immediacy of one's existence and presence. Thanh also draws attention to the child's innocence and vulnerability, as well as the sense of burden and responsibility it personifies. [JF]







Nguyen Than

Lunch

1994

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm each, set of two panels

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Than chooses to illustrate a simple activity of an everyday occurrence in this painting. Lunch, a daily activity is one where rest is welcomed after a busy morning or it can be an occasion where one relaxes before continuing with the rest of the day. As with most works by Than, a certain sense of loss and longing together with the pain of the past and hope for a brighter future can be detected in the imagery used here. [JF]

Nguyen Xuan Tiep

The Return

1993

Oil on canvas

137 x 196 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum



The physical and spiritual realms meet and melt into each other in Tiep's surreal dreamscape. While his stylised figures with the fragmented treatment of space and floating heads bearing references to Picasso's famed 1937 painting of *Guernica*, the tone of Tiep's work is markedly different from his strident anti-war protest. *The Return* is a gentle reminiscence of a childhood spent in the countryside, where the artist and his family were relocated – along with many others – during the war. The spirit of this artwork is perhaps closer to the folk aesthetic style of the well-respected artist Nguyen Tu Nghiem (1922, Nghe An), drawing on traditional village arts and cultural motifs, such as the pagoda, in an attempt to represent memory and identity. [TSU]







Nguyen Xuan Viet

Dancing in the Dong Ky Village

1998

Lacquer on board

130 x 190 cm

Witness Collection

Paying homage to his master and mentor, Viet has produced a work in the style associated with Nguyen Gia Tri (1908, Hatay Province – 1993, Ho Chi Minh City), the Father of Vietnamese lacquer painting. In this depiction of the annual Spring Festival celebrations in the Dong Ky Village, Bac Ninh Province, Viet uses the traditional colours of black, yellow and white in a similar way that Tri did, as well as portraying the joyous dancing and graciousness of Ao Dai-clad women that his mentor is most well-known for. He has also incorporated the use of broken egg shells, gold and silver leaf to give textural effects to the surfaces of depicted objects. [JF&PL]

Pham Luan

Autumn in Hanoi

1995

Oil on canvas

76 x 91 cm

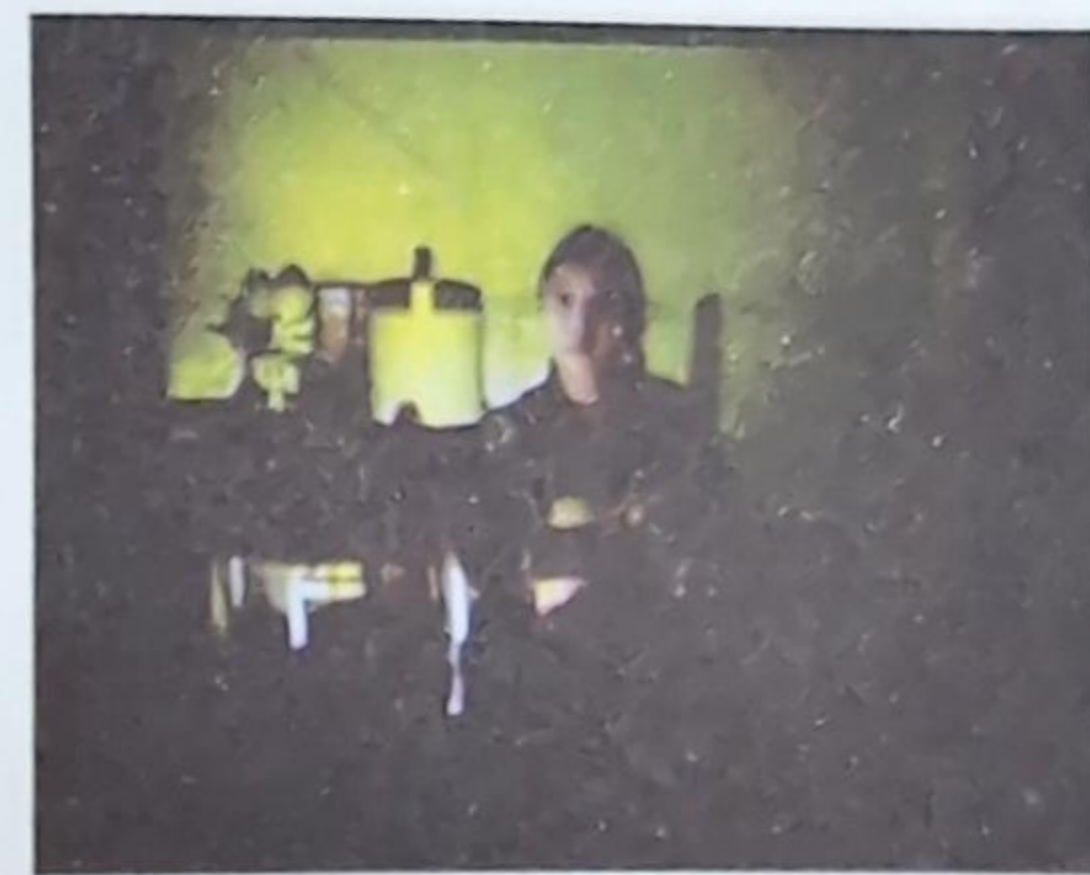
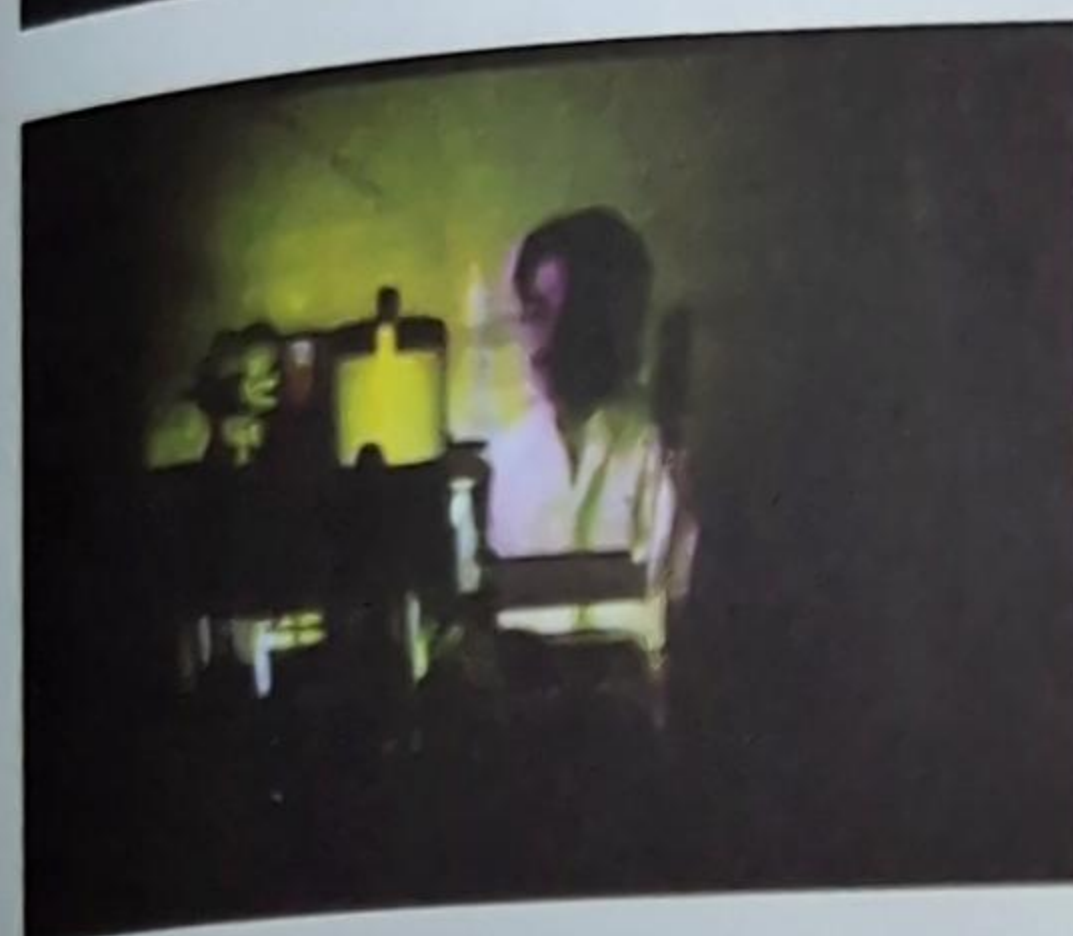
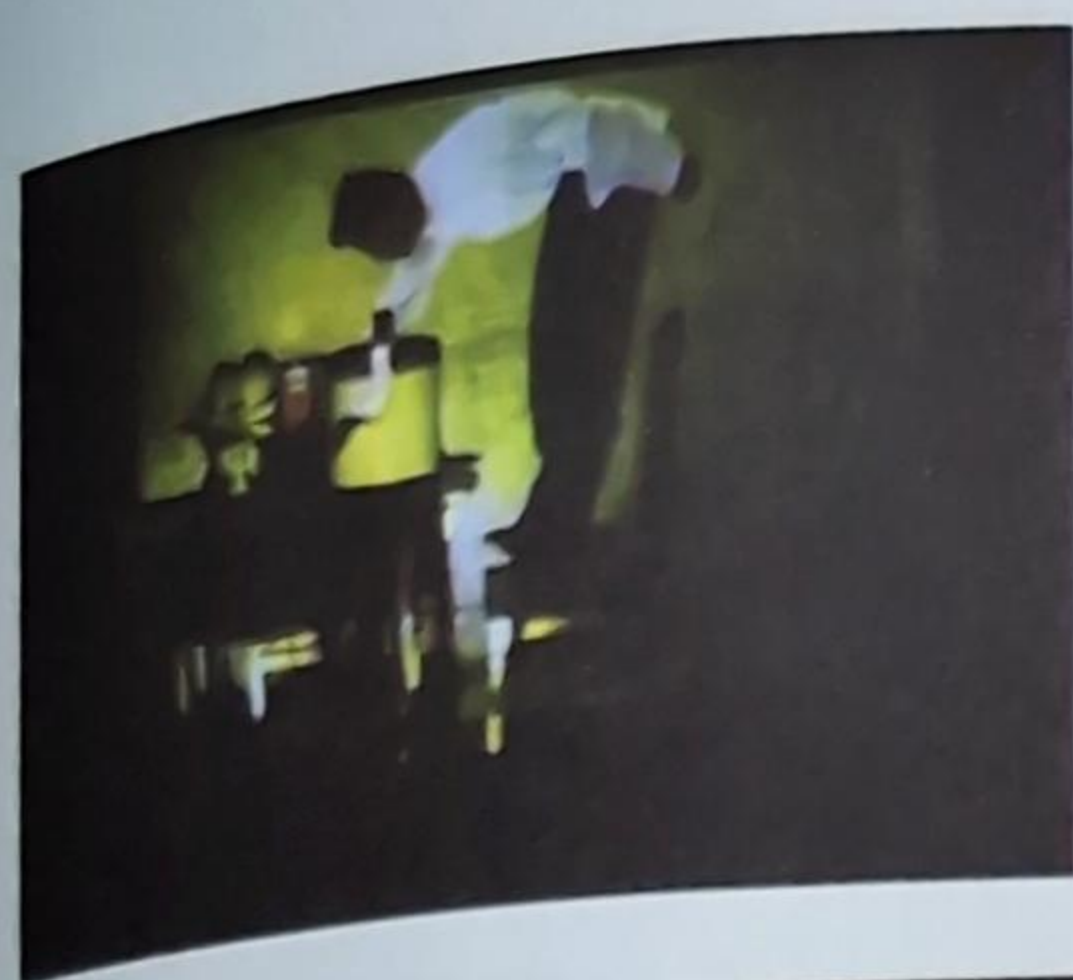
Collection of Toh Hock Ghim

Luan's interest in the light sees him capturing the spirit of the place in different seasons. In this depiction, the soft autumn light reflecting off the changing colours of the leaves gives this street in the city of Hanoi a romantic feeling bordering on sentiment and nostalgia. Luan is known to evoke such emotions through the use of impressionist brush strokes, subject matter and colour palette. [JF]









Richard Streitmatter-Tran
Missed Connections
 2004
 Film
 Collection of the artist

An evocative 'mood' piece, this short film examines the situation of being alone. It takes us through a series of tableaux where different individuals enter and exit the intimate space marked out by a mellow spotlight and bounded by shadow. The scene is set for two, yet at any one time, only one character populates the space demarcated by the screen. What unifies these seemingly disparate narratives is the table, set with various objects, which remains the central motif in every scene, around which the activities and gestures of the individuals revolve. At the start of the film, some connection between all the individuals is suggested when they mirror each other's actions; however, as the film progresses, this connection is lost as each individual pursues his/her own activity. Throughout the film we are given the sense that the individuals are waiting, perhaps for someone, a suggestion echoed visually by the abrupt severance of the other end of the table by a shadow's boundary, thus suggesting a place set for another person, at once included yet absent from the scene. The atmospheric soundtrack lends this work much of its poignancy, and the overall mood of isolation and missed opportunities for connection is without doubt a statement of our modern condition. [TSJ]



Tran Luong

Underwater

1994

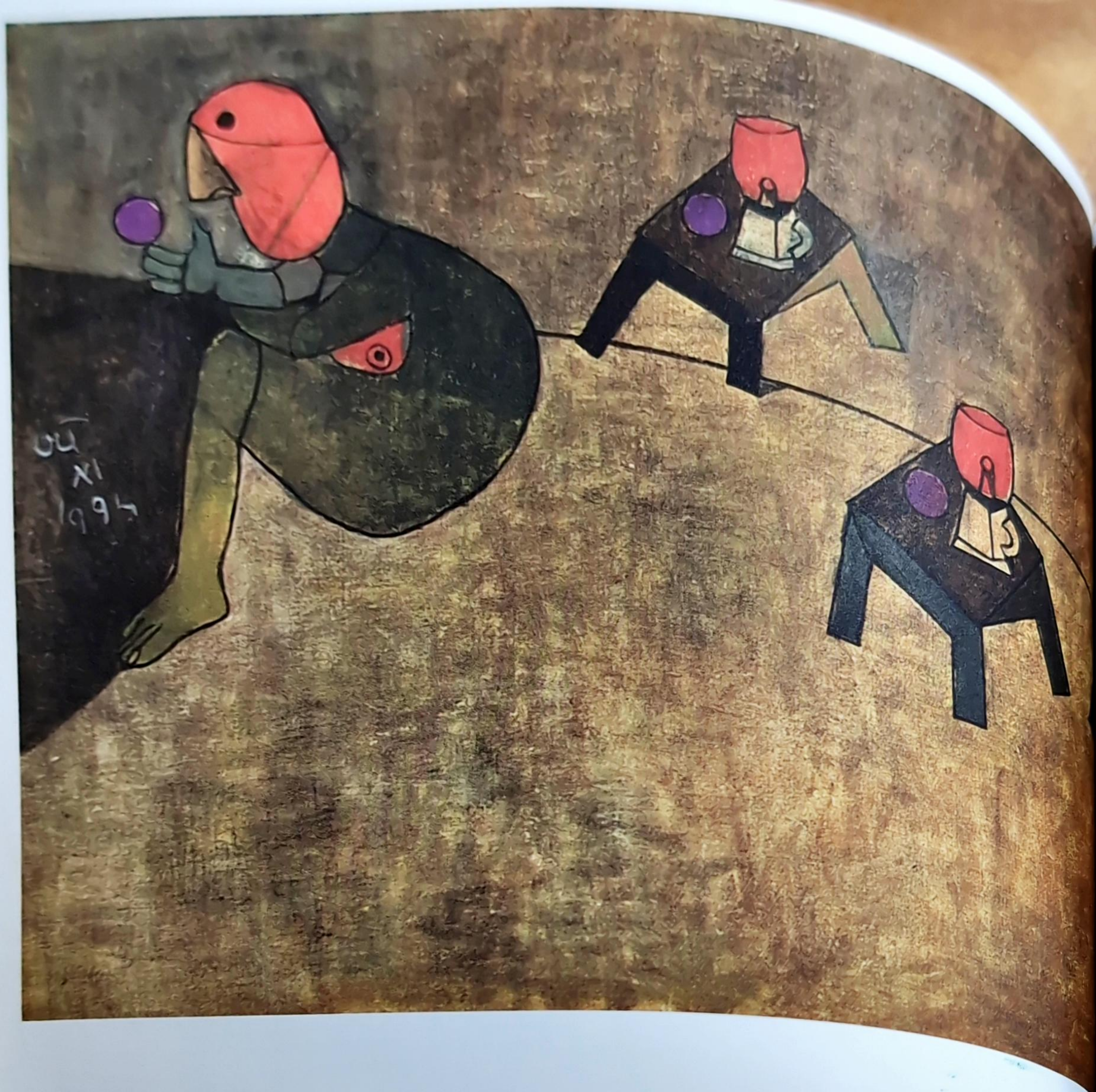
Oil on canvas

90 x 160 cm

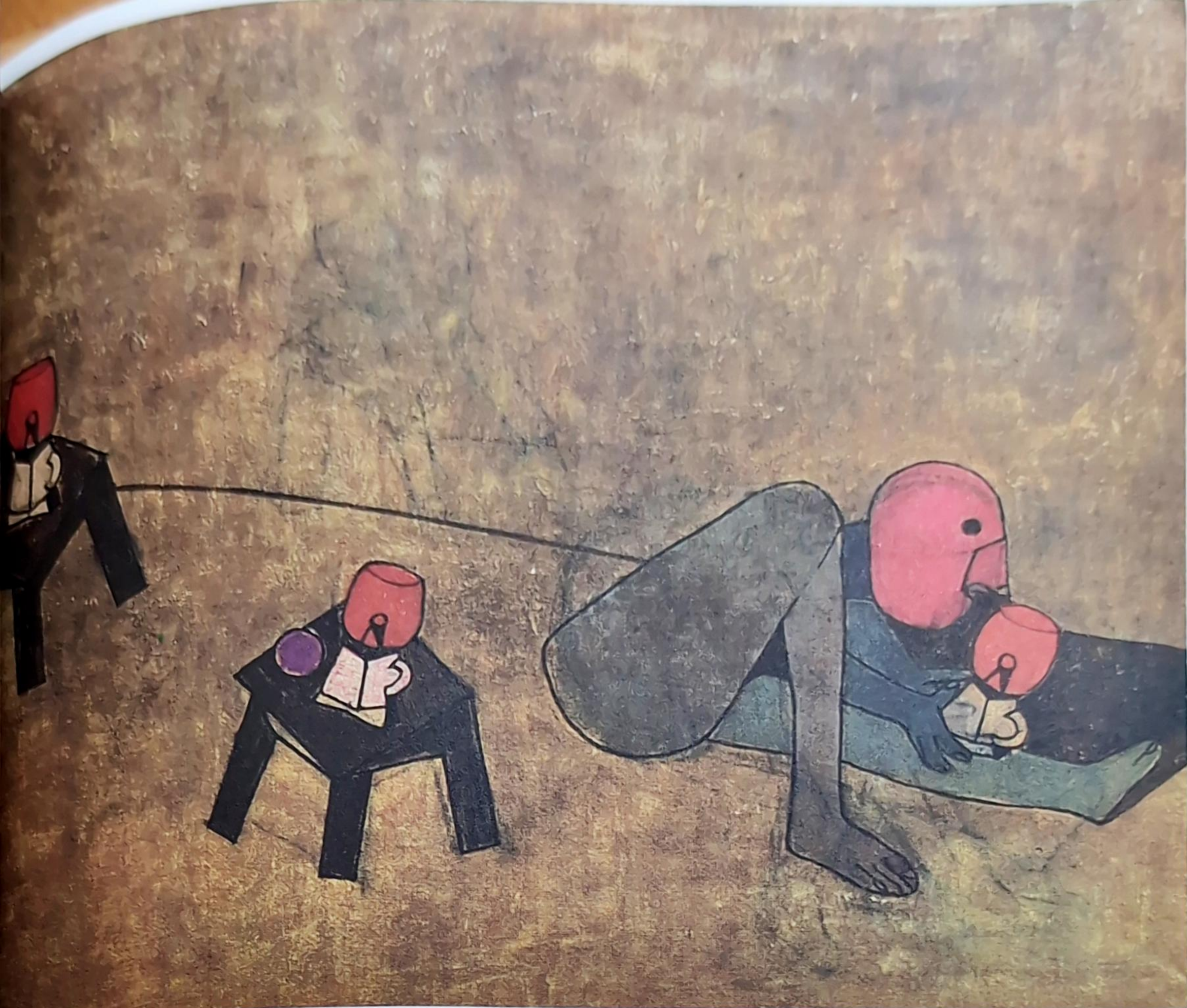
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Luong's childhood memories of growing up in the countryside during evacuations from the city of Hanoi are reflected in this painting. His keen observation of life in the ponds and padi fields form the main inspiration of his paintings, whether oil on canvas or gouache on handmade traditional paper. The recurring motif of the eye can be observed in this work. It alludes to the caring and kind-hearted villagers that constantly kept an eye on the groups of children, such as the ones that Luong belonged to, evading the bomb attacks. [JF]





566
12
995



Tran Trong Vu

Untitled

1994

Oil on canvas

104 x 252 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

While producing this painting, Vu was self-reflective about his own existence and purpose in life, asking existential questions such as "Why am I here?" and "Why are you here?" He projected his self into the figures who occupy the same time-space in the painting but yet, are unaware of each other. They appear to be searching or groping in dim spaces, with the oil lamps being the only light sources in the room. In using the oil lamp and the wooden stool as symbols, Vu also made references to the hard times faced by the people where such objects were essential during the war and the economic depression of previous decades. [JF&PL]



Vuong Van Thao

Living Fossils

2006

Acrylic, stoneware, glaze

House: 25 x 25 x 30 cm

Pole: 35 x 10 x 10 cm

Suite of 36 pairs

Collection of the artist

Thao's mixed-media work comprises replicas of 36 buildings located in Hanoi's historic and atmospheric Old Quarter. Each of the famous '36 streets' has been faithfully represented by an actual building which stands on that street, and each building was chosen by the artist for its traditional and historic architectural features. Thao has encased his replicas in cracked resin blocks, to imitate the look of an aged fossil. With rapid modernisation and mass culture fast encroaching on the historic and cultural authenticity of Hanoi's Old Quarter, Thao's work is a statement about the co-existence of old and new, historical discontinuity, and displacement. [TSL]



The beginnings of the modern art movement in Vietnam are attributed to the French who founded institutions that provided formal training in the arts. The French advocated a system that incorporated the teaching of craft and adapted such traditions for modern

TRANSFO

expressions. This gave rise to the development of lacquer and silk painting that continued to be regarded as embodying the essence of being Vietnamese. The French also introduced oil painting to Vietnam and promoted principles of Western art. With a firm foundation

in place, experimentations continued into the present with artists making further advancements in techniques, styles and approaches. With the recent opening of the country and improvement in communications, contemporary art forms such

FORMATION

as installation art, film and video art, and performance art were introduced to Vietnam. The art scene in Vietnam is also further energised with the presence of *Viet Kieu* (overseas Vietnamese) artists who have for the past decade made Vietnam their working base.

Bui Huu Hung
Ancient Stage I

1994

Lacquer on board

100 x 104 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Traditional lacquer method was first applied to painting at the Ecole des Beaux-arts de l'Indochine that created a new genre of art. Since then, experimentation in this area has brought about new colours and surface textures, as well as techniques. In this early work by Hung, he has incorporated non-traditional materials such as the gauze-like fabric and a carved wooden decorative element that was once part of a household fixture. By the deliberate placement of the fabric and the wooden element, he has composed an image of a stage. The foreground has a mist-like greyish border that makes reference to the rising smoke of burning incense. The background however, is ambiguous where in using gold leaf and paint, Trung evokes an ethereal presence. The golden disc form can also be the moon while the dark ground, the night sky. In this manner, the stage functions as a window and imbues the painting with romanticism and nostalgia. [JF&PL]



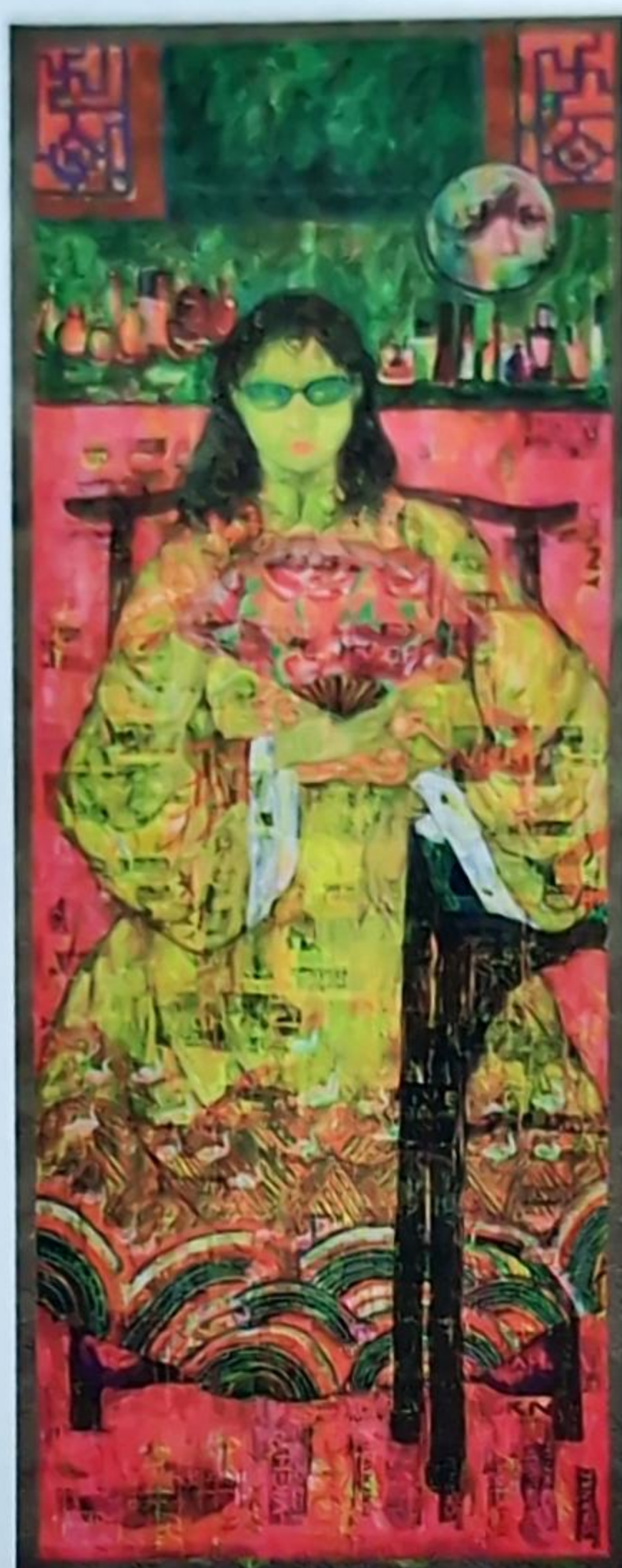






Dang Xuan Hoa
Human Objects No 1
 1994
 Oil on canvas
 80 x 100 cm
 Private collection

Using a flattened perspective, Hoa has randomly depicted a myriad of objects found in a typical Vietnamese home. These objects – a bowl of fruits, ceramic vases, statuary and alter paraphernalia – represents Hoa's attempts in conveying his unique Vietnamese sensibility that he regards as critical in contemporary Vietnamese expressions. His emphasis on traditional values is translated into these objects and the human presence, in this instance, is symbolised through their functions and uses. [JF]



Ha Manh Thang

The Artist

The Artist Girlfriend

2007

Acrylic on paper

255 x 83 cm

Collection of Pho Hong Long

The artist playfully combines the traditional with the contemporary in this double portrait of himself and his girlfriend. The hanging scroll format of this pair of paintings is traditional, but their bright colours are wholly contemporary, drawn from the visual language of advertising and Pop Art. The artist and his partner sit enthroned on old-fashioned carved wooden chairs that bring Chinese ancestral portraits to mind, but both figures are surrounded by a beguiling mix of symbols and motifs drawn from traditional as well as contemporary mass culture. Under the thin wash of colour used to depict the figures, a collage of advertisements proclaiming the most desirable luxury brand names is visible. This suggestion of our modern-day obsession with consumption and the power of the mass media to shape image and demand is reinforced by the arsenal of beauty products lined up behind the artist's girlfriend. [TSL]







Ho Huu Thu

Abstract II

1999

Lacquer on board

180 x 40 cm each, set of three panels

Collection of the artist

This three-panel lacquer painting depicts the changing light in a landscape. This natural phenomenon is expressed by the simplification of colours, lines and shades. In this purely abstract work, the artist experimented by patching a few spots with eggshell, and leaving parts of the lacquer surface unpolished. According to Thu, he wants to express "the impact of the changing environment" and how it has "eclipsed the truth of nature." [PL]



Le Quang Ha
The Dictator
2007
Oil on canvas
250 x 300 cm
Collection of the artist

The god-like figure depicted in this painting, with its eight arms spreading across almost the entire width of the painting, visually challenges the dimensions of the canvas. The pile of machinery in the background looks as if it is part of the figure's ongoing mutation. The impact and effects of modernisation are expressed strongly here, highlighting the negative consequences of the socio-economic changes that are taking place in Vietnam today and how they impact the environment and the human condition. [PL]





Le Quoc Viet

9 Levels of Lotus (Hands)

9 Levels of Lotus (Feet)

2001

Chinese ink on *do* paper

240 x 60 cm

Collection of the artist

Viet often combines painting, calligraphy, woodblock printing and ink drawing in his work. Although the presentation of his work is steeped in the classical fine arts tradition, they are nonetheless contemporary in its expression and content. Often they reflect his critical commentaries of the changing Vietnamese society where morals and ethics are in danger of being eroded in the face of advancement and progress. Viet frequently uses the image of a monk's head to symbolise the simple act of leading a highly moral life which perhaps reflects his desire of wanting to be a better person. This imagery is prominent in this pair of scroll paintings and their titles draw reference to Buddhist teachings where the lotus represents enlightenment. He has also drawn attention to the "hands" where they symbolise mercy and to "feet", humility. [JF]

Nguyen Bach Dan

The Emptiness II

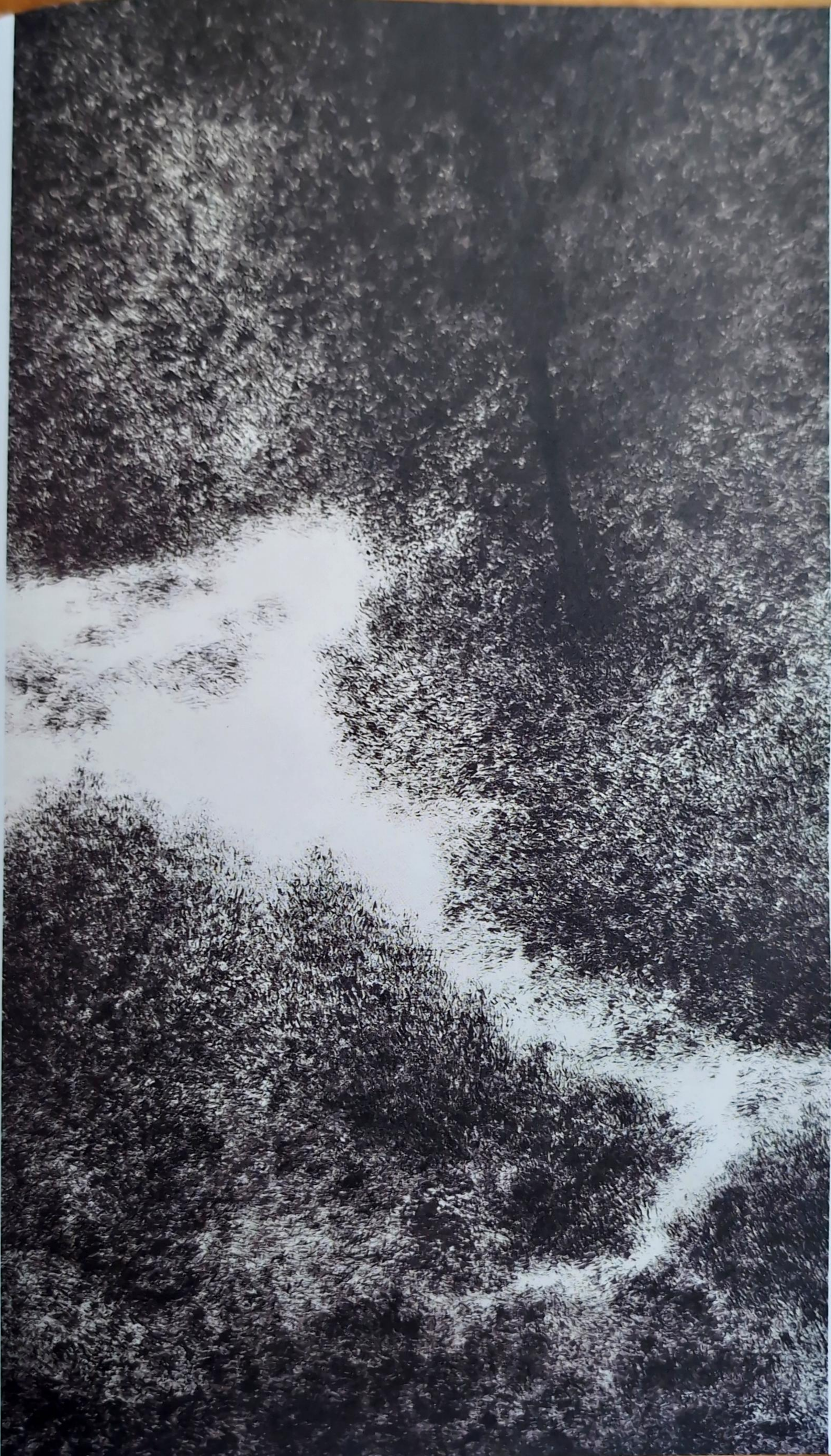
2006

Chinese ink on *xuan* paper


180 x 97 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

In this landscape painting, the artist experiments with the traditional medium of Chinese ink. She uses a dramatic composition in which two large fields of black are carved out by a white chasm. The unpainted area contrasts with the density and intensity of the ink. A flurry of small, black strokes create a textured effect that overwhelms the silhouette of a single tree, making it barely discernable. [PL]







Nguyen Quan
Human Face I
1993

Oil on canvas
80 x 75 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Quan developed an interest in surrealism while he was studying in Germany during the late 1960s. Over time, a painting style evolved that incorporated Western influences with a Vietnamese sensibility, belying an Asian tendency. His ideas were highly influential in the early *Doi Moi* period, from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. This painting embodies his beliefs and is part of the *Human Face* series where an abstract rendition of a head, unmistakably feminine in the colours used, is the focal point. [JF]

Pham Huy Thong

Petit Ange

2007

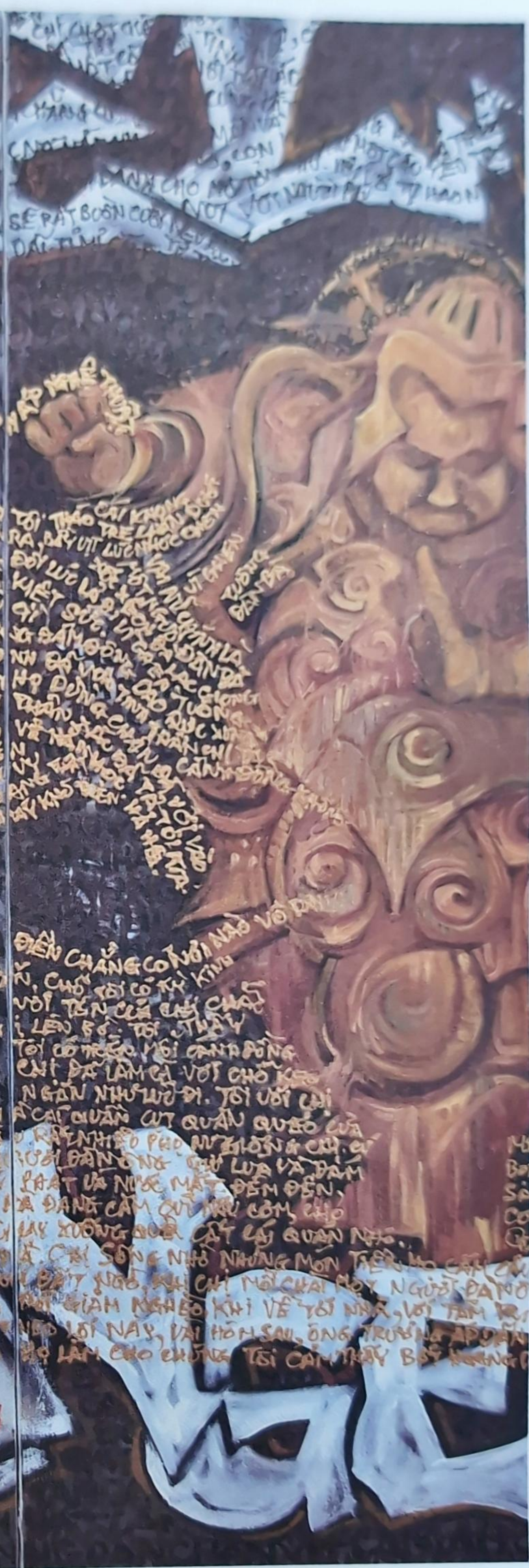
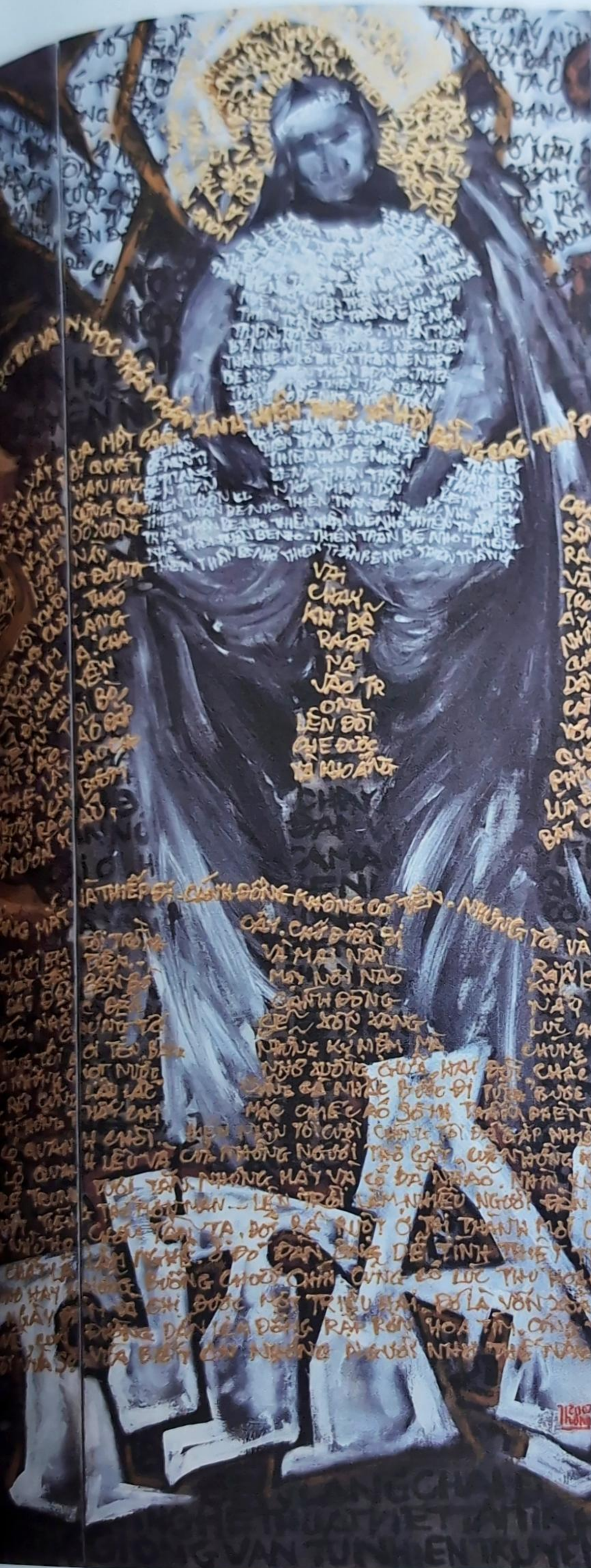
Acrylic on canvas

150 x 50 cm, each set of three panels

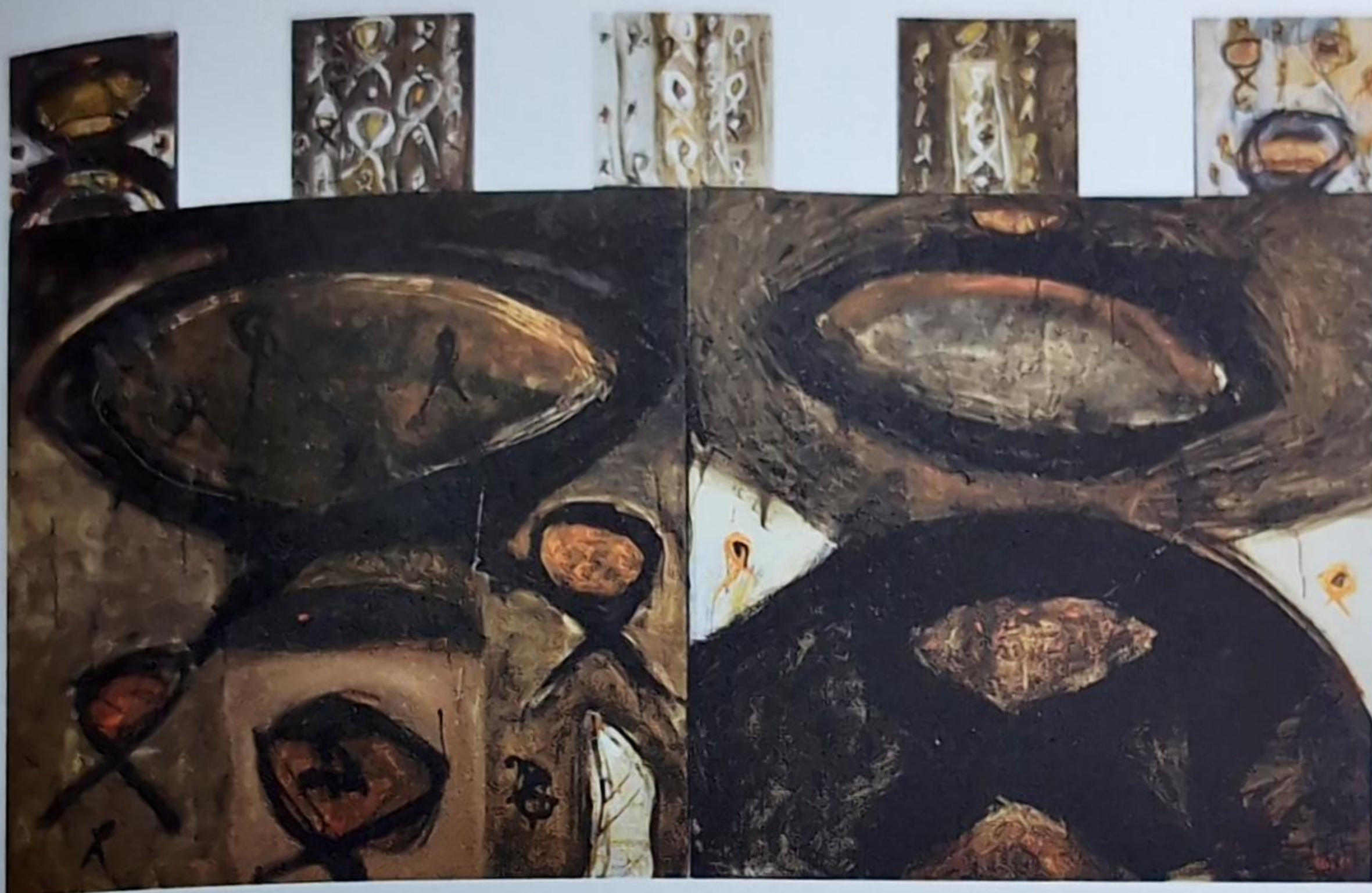
Witness Collection

This painting is a response to a recent event involving a young female writer, Nguyen Ngoc Tu whose novel *Endless Field* aroused misgivings. The story revolves around the hardships of the farming community in the Mekong Delta and although it is fictional, the novel was thought to be biographical as actual names of places were used. It was therefore regarded as a social and political criticism and provoked a ban on the novel. However with strong public support shown by the literary and artistic communities and the eventual acceptance of the author's explanation, the novel was accepted as a work of fiction. It also saw the reinstatement of the Vietnamese Writers' Association award that recognised the literary work as one of the best stories for the Year 2006. Reflecting on the events that had taken place, the artist depicted the writer, in the middle panel, as an angel and a martyr. She is flanked on both sides by door guardians who represented the traditionalists that attempt to bind her with chains of text taken from her novel. [JF]









Tran Van Thao

One Sixth

1996

Oil on canvas

34 x 34 cm each, four panels

130 x 130 cm each, two panels

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Believing that painting is a pleasure through which he can come to understand more about nature, Thao indulges in the spontaneity of the brush stroke in this multi-panel work. Through a masterful handling of the medium, he has managed to capture the free spirit of the abstract expressionist approach despite the use of a limited palette of dark and earthy tones. He has also expressed his playfulness in allowing the work to be displayed in various configurations. [JF&PL]

Truong Be

Tree of Life

2002

Lacquer on board

135 x 90 cm, each, set of three panels

Collection of the artist



This abstract lacquer painting reveals the virtuosity of the artist in his handling of a difficult medium. His characteristic marks – the swirling lines and grid patterning – are expertly set onto the surface of the painting, amidst the numerous layers of gold and silver subtly revealed through careful process of lacquering and polishing. Be has also incorporated eggshell and sand to create a textural surface. (JF&PL)





Vu Dan Tan

Beauty will Save the World

2003

Recycled cardboard & Chinese ink

168 x 36 each, suite of 12 sculptures

Collection of the artist

Tan's unique art holds particular fascination for his audiences, both at home and abroad. Tan recycles the detritus of consumerist society, turning discarded materials into works of art, often infused with humour and playfulness. A quote from Dostoevsky's famed novel *The Idiot*, "beauty will save the world" lends the name to this suite of 12 cardboard figures, each evocative of the female form. The human body is suggested by its very absence and the use of negative space, and a sense of the individual is conveyed through the placement of the hands. [TSL]

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Nguyen Trung

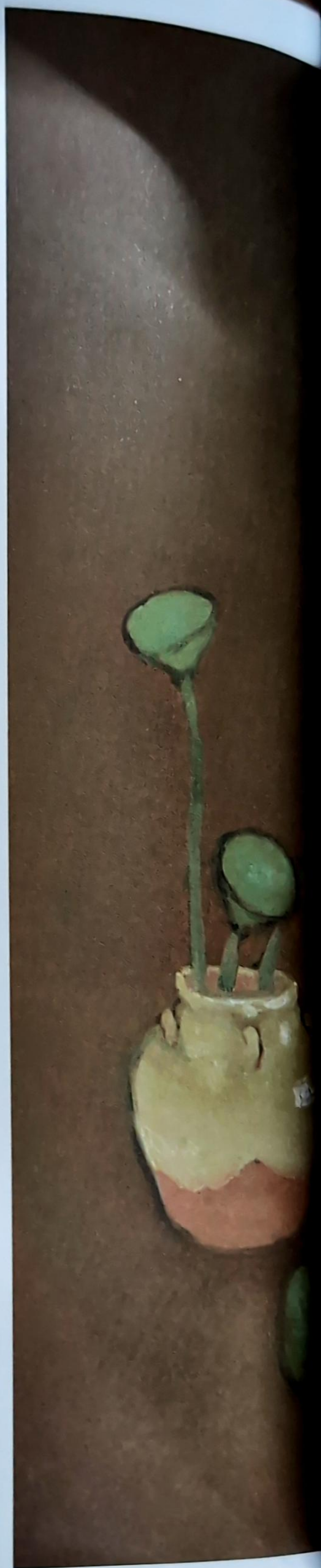
Meditation

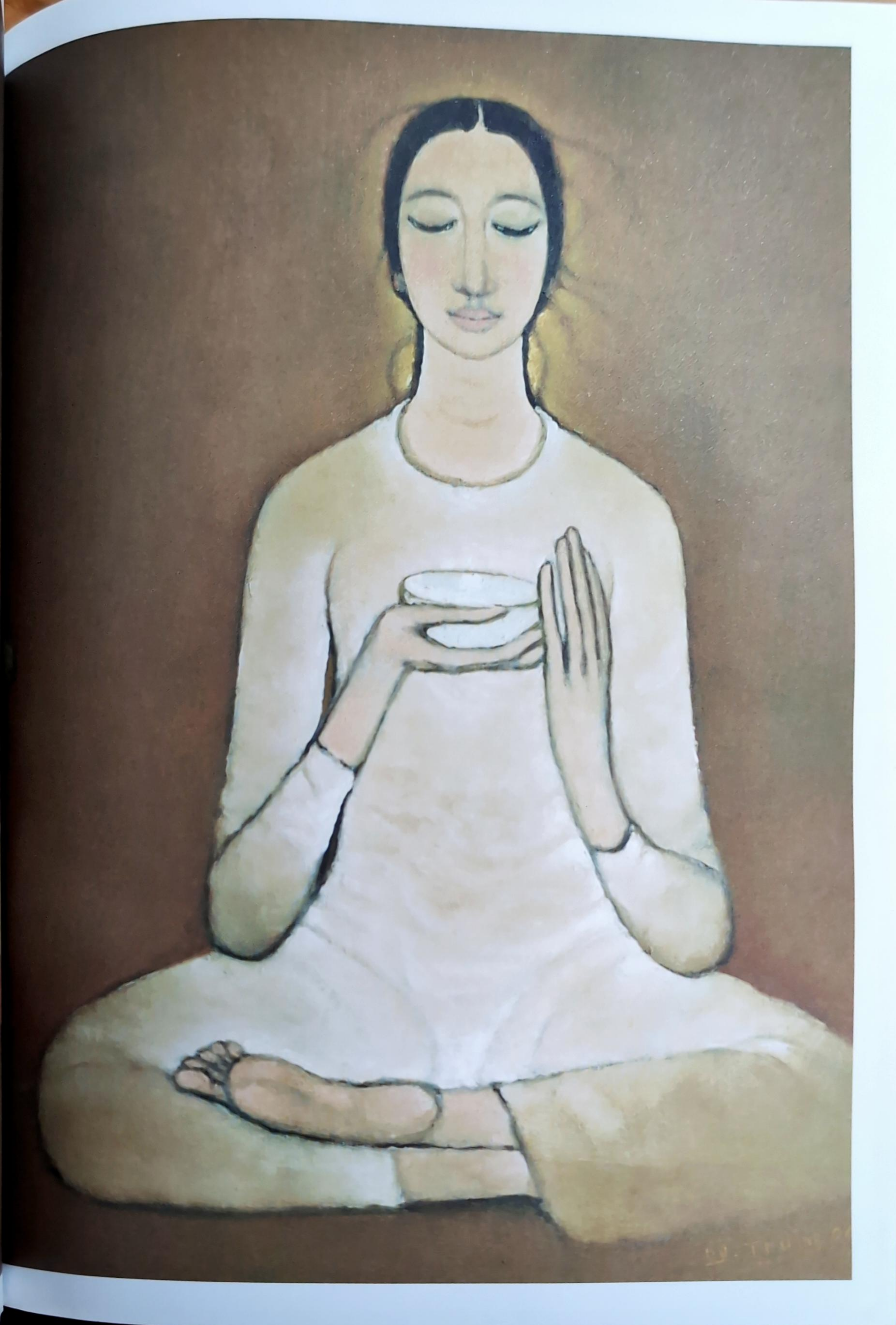
Oil on canvas

100 x 100 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum - Gift of Galerie Via Eight

While Trung's abstract paintings are a union of European formalism and Buddhist philosophy and aesthetics, his figurative works often feature highly-stylised female figures in serene Buddhist-like settings. In the latter, he uses elegant lines and the figures are often depicted in meditative poses with graceful hand gestures. For the artist, beauty refers to the symbol of purity and compassion "inspired by the Bodhisattva Guanyin." [PL]





EVENT REPORT

Kết Nói

**Vietnam-Singapore
Performance Art Event**

**Tan Siuli
Assistant Curator,
Singapore Art Museum**



This collaborative performance involving all 13 artist-participants in the Singapore Management University concluded *Ket Noi: Vietnam-Singapore Performance Art Event*.

Conceived as an adjunct programme to the *Post-Doi Moi* exhibition, the *Ket Noi* project brought together five performance artists from Vietnam and five from Singapore in a two-part programme comprising a ten-day performance art workshop, and a three-day performance art event. As *Post-Doi Moi* aims to investigate new, contemporary art practices and approaches in Vietnam, there was a need for a platform to address the praxis of performance art – an art form that cannot be adequately dealt with within an exhibition context.

In recent history there have been various initiatives in Singapore which engage with performance art, for example, *Open Ends* in 2001 by the Substation and recently, *Future Of Imagination* and *Fetterfield*. While these largely artist-initiated performance art festivals and events present exciting opportunities to showcase this art form, organisers have conceded that there are inherent problems with this format, such as the artist-participants' lack of dialogue and engagement with each other. Post-performance forums are useful in facilitating exchange and

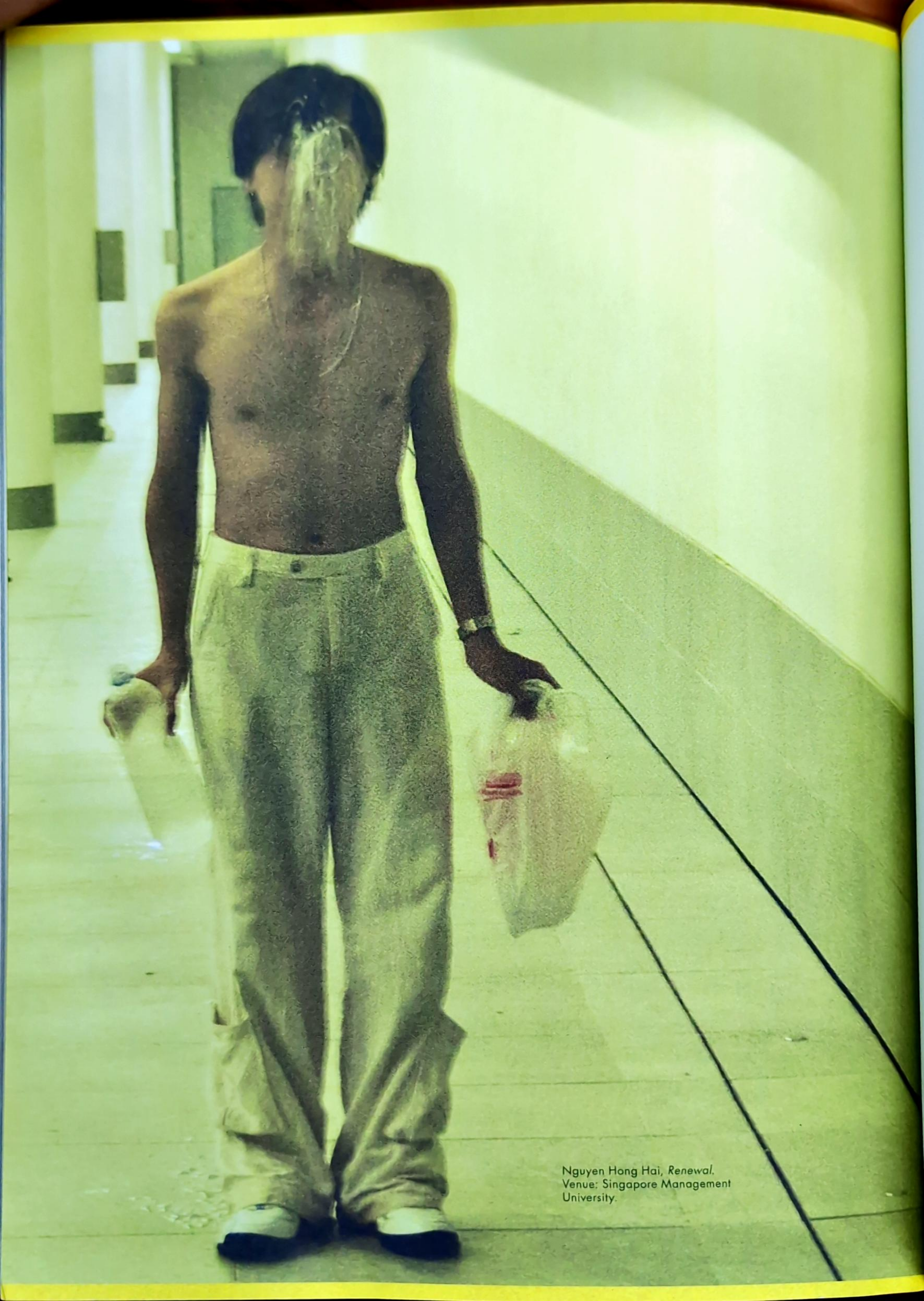
Participating Artists

Vietnam:

Nguyen Hong Hai
Nguyen Huy An
Nguyen Quang Huy
Phan Thi Thao Nguyen
Tran Luong
Vu Duc Toan

Singapore:

Angie Seah
Ezzam Rahman
Jason Lim
Jeremy Hiah
Kai Lam
Lee Wen
Lina Adam



Nguyen Hong Hai, *Renewal*.
Venue: Singapore Management
University.



Participants at a workshop session. From left to right, Tran Luong, Angie Seah, Nguyen Quang Huy, Kai Lam and Jeremy Hiah. Venue: Post Museum



Nguyen Quang Huy (front) working on his sculptural form in the workshop that he conducted with Jason Lim in the background. Venue: Post Museum

understanding between the performing artists and the public who attend such events; however, there is little opportunity for the artists involved to dialogue amongst themselves and discuss or share approaches in their praxis. It is common during such festivals for artists to travel in to the host country for a few days, perform their piece, and then fly home. Any artistic exchange at all with the hosts or with other artists in the host country would take place on a purely informal or incidental basis, time permitting.

It was with this in mind that the Singapore Art Museum proposed a residential component for *Ket Noi* and subsequently invited as artist-moderators Tran Luong (from Vietnam), Lee Wen and Jason Lim (from Singapore). Having themselves organised several performance art events, the three were keen to explore other options, and in particular, one that would promote artistic dialogue and exchange between its participants. These aims perfectly aligned with those of the Vietnam Festival in Singapore. Project *Ket Noi* (meaning 'Connect' in Vietnamese) was thus born, as an adjunct programme of the Vietnamese art exhibition in the Singapore Art Museum. Having the institutional support of the Singapore Art Museum created the rare opportunity to offer a residential, interactive workshop component for participating artists - one that would fulfill the objectives of promoting artistic exchange and dialogue between artists of both countries.

From 27th May to 5th June, five Vietnamese performance artists and five Singaporean performance artists selected by the artist-moderators convened at the alternative art space of Post Museum to present their praxis and conduct workshops for the other participants. These often turned into highly-charged



From left to right: Lina Adam, *Untitled (House of Love and House of Hate)*; Ezzam Rahman, *Food for Sale*; Nguyen Huy An, *Pushing Limits*.
Venue: Singapore Management University

performances in themselves. This residential workshop component culminated in a three-day performance art event at the Singapore Management University. As a result of their prior interaction with each other and with their newfound understanding of each other's practice, the participating artists collaborated in a collective performance that concluded the event, in addition to their individual pieces.

Ket Noi does not end there. A problem frequently encountered by researchers of performance art is the issue of documentation. The history and dissemination of this art form usually relies on stills and / or written accounts. In order to arrive at a fuller understanding of each artist's practice and the work(s) they presented for *Ket Noi*, the Singapore Art Museum undertook documentation in the form of photography as well as videography. In addition, a full publication for *Ket Noi* has been planned, which will include a survey of each artist's practice and past works, in order to contextualise the pieces presented at *Ket Noi*. Commentaries on the proceedings of the *Ket Noi* workshop will also be published, with the aim of further clarifying the artists' intentions and approaches in their art. It is hoped that this effort will contribute in some part to a wider understanding and appreciation of this art form, which has a controversial and chequered history in both Singapore and Vietnam.

It is difficult to measure 'success' where intangibles are concerned. Whether or not *Ket Noi* succeeded in its aims of promoting artistic exchange or dialogue between its participants can not be immediately visible or judged by the performances that the artists put up during the event. The influences and impressions may remain sub-conscious, and resurface only later in re-interpretations and re-workings. However, *Ket Noi's* importance is in having set a precedent for a co-operative and collaborative residency-cum-performance art event for artists practising in

the region, under the auspices of a national art museum. The workshop and performance art event also offered an insight on the differing approaches towards performance taken by Singaporean artists and Vietnamese artists.

More importantly perhaps, what *Ket Noi* offered each of its artist-participants was a rare opportunity to take leave of the daily grind and concentrate full-time on their art and on being, simply, an artist. The residential workshop component - although intense - was greatly valued by all participants for the opportunity it gave them to have a 'space' of their own: a physical, mental and psychological 'space' to breathe and to develop their art and think about their practice, as well as appreciate the various approaches of other artists who contributed to the workshop.

The way forward from here is manifold: *Ket Noi* could, in future, develop in programming to include artists from other countries in Southeast Asia. This would mark a great step forward towards the study of a very contemporary art practice that urgently needs to be researched and documented in this region. Key practitioners, hindered by lack of support (financial and institutional), as well as official censure in their home countries, have taken their practice abroad where they have gained a critical following. There needs to be more effort in the region to study and support performance art, and critically locate this approach towards art-making within a Southeast Asian context.



Nguyen Quang Huy,
Women Temple.
Venue: Singapore Art Museum

VIETNAM TIMELINE:

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MID-19TH CENTURY TO 1990

1858 Landing of the Franco-Spanish force at the principal trading port of Tourane (present-day Da Nang). The aggression was initiated against Vietnam in response to the execution of Monsignor José Sarrurjo Diaz, Bishop of Tonkin (northern Vietnam), who was a Spanish, a year earlier. This was a culmination of the suppression by the Nguyen Court of Catholicism and resistance to Westernisation since the early 1800s that the French used as reasons for their aggression. The attack did considerable damages but the French forces were unable to gain a significant foothold.

1861 Unable to capture the north, The French sailed southwards to attack the city of Gia Dinh (previously Saigon and now, Ho Chi Minh City). Victory at the Battle of Ky Hoo Forts led to the establishment of French control, the eventual toppling of the Vietnamese empire and formation of French Indochina, comprising Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

1885 Signing of the Patenotre Treaty that marked the end of Vietnam's independence.

Late 19th C The start of the resistance against the French after their victory in the south in which the Nguyen kings and former court official participated. The movement continued into the 20th century until the defeat of the French army at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Reformist literature from China also found its way into the Vietnamese intellectual circle, as well as nationalist literature from Japan and Europe.

1904 Founding of the Association for the Modernisation of Vietnam.

1907 Founding of the Free School of the Eastern Capital (Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc, or Tonkin Study Institute) in Hanoi which was modelled after the Keio Gijuku in Japan where Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926, also known as Tay Ho) was one of the lecturers. The aim of the school was to provide education in modernist and Western ideology, and one of its achievements was the series of free lectures that invoked vigorous debates and discussions on modernism. Later in the year, the School was forced to close by the French as it extended its influence over Hanoi and surrounding provinces.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

ART ACTIVITIES

1861 The first Vietnamese artist to study abroad was Le Van Mien (1873, Nghe An -1943, Hue) who spent four years (1891-1894) at L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He was regarded as the first to master the technique of oil painting, and was a principal of the Imperial College in Hue.

1906 Birth of To Ngoc Van (1906-1954), one of the recognised "Four Masters" to emerge from L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine where he studied from 1926 to 1931. He was an advocate of Western artistic values and was heavily influenced by Western thought. Later, inspired by nationalism and anti-colonial fervour, he fled to the hills of the Bac Tay and became the founding director of the College of Fine Arts in 1950.

1913 Founding of a small art school, L'Ecole de Dessin (School of Drawing) in the South, in Gia Dinh district that is about 10 kilometres from Saigon proper. The French engineering architect Andre Joyeux was attributed to its establishment together two French pioneers, L'Helgovach and Garnier. The first class comprised 15 students that were taught the basics in drafting and art.

1917 L'Ecole de Dessin in Saigon was renamed Gia Dinh Decorative Arts School and was admitted into L'Union Centrale des Arts decoratifs de Paris (The Central Union of Decorative Arts of Paris).

1920 After winning the Indochina Art prize of 1920, Victor Tardieu (1867-1937) arrived in Hanoi. He accepted two mural commissions for the University of Indochina and the Central Library, and after their completion, remained in Vietnam.

OUTSIDE OF VIETNAM

1905 Japan's victory in the Russo-Japan War (1904-1905) had a profound impact on Vietnam, demonstrated the mastering of Western technology for the use in advancing national interest by an Asian people. Japan was hailed as exemplary and her victory formed the catalyst for the Movement for Modernisation (Phong Trao Duy Tan). The passion for 'new learning' saw young patriots embarking on studies in Japan. However, the "Japan dream" was abruptly demolished with the signing of the Franco-Japanese agreement in 1908 that saw Japan joining the ranks of the Imperialists. The Vietnamese that were then in Japan were expelled on France's request.

1912 Following the Chinese Revolution of 1911 under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen and the establishment of the Republic of China, the Vietnamese nationalists shifted their focus and regrouped under the League for the Restoration of Vietnam (Viet Nam Quang Phu Hoi) to seek Chinese assistance. The movement was later renamed in 1932 as the Vietnam League for National Restoration (Viet Nam Phus Quoc Dong Minh Hoi) following the re-alignment with Japan, Tokyo being its headquarters.

PERIOD

1905-1912 Go East Movement (Dong Du) that started in 1905 with the focus on sending Vietnamese to Japan to learn modern skills. This was in hope that the knowledge would be applied in the revolt against the French.

19TH CENTURY-1905

1906-1919

1925 Founding of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Thanh Nien Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi) by Ho Chi Minh in Guangzhou, China.

1930 The Communist Party of Indochina (Dang Cong San Dong Duong) or CPI was founded in Hong Kong by Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese living in exile. It was the merger of two factions – the Indochinese Communist Party and the Communist Party of Annam. The Party dissolved in 1945 and subsequently after the re-unification of Vietnam in 1976, the Communist Party of Vietnam came into existence.

1940 Japan signed agreements with the Vichy regime of France that allowed the Japanese, in pursuit of its "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", to use Indochina in preparation for the conquest of Southeast Asia. France was in turned permitted to assert civil control over their colonies with Vietnam continued to be under French administration.

1941 Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh) or Viet Minh in short was founded in May by Ho Chi Minh to seek independence from France and to oppose the Japanese.

1925 Founding of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in Hanoi with Victor Tardieu (1867-1937) as its first director. Joseph Inguimberty (1896-197) arrived after being accepted to teach decorative arts at the Ecole.

1929 Nam Son who studied at L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1925 to 1927 began teaching at L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine. He continued to teach there until the college closed in 1945.

1930 First graduating class from L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine comprising six students that included Nguyen Phan Chanh (1892-1984), Le Pho (1907-2001) and Mai Trung Thu (1906-1980).

1936 Nguyen Gia Tri (1908-1993) graduated from L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine.

1937 Passing away of Victor Tardieu in Hanoi and Evariste Jonchere was appointed director of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine.

1939 To Ngoc Van who studied at L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine from 1926 to 1931 (second graduating class) started teaching at his *alma mater*.

1940 The Gia Dinh Decorative Arts School in Saigon was renamed L'Ecole des Arts appliqués de Gia Dinh (The School of Applied Arts, Gia Dinh) and included majors in painting, architecture drafting and printmaking in the areas of folk art, Oriental and Occidental art.

1941 Bui Xuan Phai (1921-1988) and Nguyen Tu Nghiem (1922) entered L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine. However, with the 1945 revolution, this class and the following four intakes were unable to complete the full five-year programme. The last intake was in 1944 that had 10 students, among which were Phan Ke An (b.1923) and Duong Bich Lien (1924-1988).

1917 Russian revolution took place in 1917 and followed by the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1921. The formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics took place in 1922 and existed until 1991.

1939 World War II broke out in Europe.

1943 Truong Chinh, Secretary-General of the CPI from 1941 to 1954 wrote the Thesis on Vietnamese Culture and established a cultural front to obtain support from the students and intellectuals.

1944 The Communist Party founded the National Salvation Cultural Association which then sparked off discussions among the intellectuals on the Party's cultural policies and perspectives. Following, a number of interlocking front organisations and clandestine newspapers began emerging that introduced ICP position on art.

1945 Japan staged a coup de force in March against the French administration and assumed full control over Vietnam. Following the August Revolution, the leadership of Ho Chi Minh government was installed under the founding of a new state – the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The French however re-gained control of Hanoi and the Viet Minh government moved to its base in Tay Bac Province, establishing a Resistance Zone in the north.

The last Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai (1913-1997) abdicated and gave his power to the Democratic Republican government under Ho Chi Minh. He left a year later to live in China and Hong Kong but the French persuaded him to return in 1949 as Head of State. He abdicated the second time in 1955, handing power to Ngo Dinh Diem, his prime minister who took control of the south with support from the United States.

1946 The French launched an offensive against the Viet Minh at Haiphong. This was the start of the French War or the First Indochina War as it is commonly known.

1943 Bombing of Hanoi by United States intended for Japanese targets resulted in the uprooting of the painting department and part of the sculpture departments of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine to Son Tay. Architecture and the rest of the sculpture department left for Dalat while applied arts went to Phu Ly.

1945 L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine was officially closed, and in its existence over two decades, there were 84 graduates. 31 students did not graduate as they were unable to complete the course due to the outbreak of war. Production of propaganda posters started.

1946 Although the Democratic Republic of Vietnam established a fine arts school in Hanoi immediately following the closure of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine, the Resistance War erupted before the institution could get started. Besides, many of the artists were sympathetic to the Viet Minh cause and left with the Revolutionary Army to the hills in Tay Bac. In August, the first national exhibition was organised at the Municipal Theatre in Hanoi. Most of the works on display conveyed nationalistic sentiments with subjects relating to the struggle for independence.

1940 With France's surrender to Germany, Vietnam came under German-installed French government. The administration adopted a policy orientated towards "work, family and fatherland" (*travail-famille-patrie*) that brought about a revival of heroic and historical themes in literature and art and an emphasis on the rural society, a further catalyst to growing nationalist sentiments.

1937-1946 World War II

1884-1954 French Colonial Rule

1920-1941

1942-1946

1948 In the northern headquarters of the Viet Minh forces, Truong Chinh clarified and elaborated the role and position of artists in the revolution where he drew attention to the differences between the art that was produced in the cities (that is, Hanoi) and that of the Resistance. He referred to the former as decadent serving colonialism and the selfish interests of the national bourgeoisie while the latter as patriotic serving nation and the people. He deemed artistic approaches in Impressionism, cubism and other modernist tendencies as "unscientific" and anti-revolutionary". The objective of the CPI was then to gear artists towards Socialist Realism, to produce "wholesome, politically correct and highly accessible" art so as to raise people's political awareness and to induce them to sacrifice for the revolution.

1953 Start of land reforms where privately-owned land was seized and redistributed to poor farmers. This resulted in a mass exodus of those affected to the south.

1954 With the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, a number of the artists and intellectuals returned to Hanoi. The country was divided into the north and south at the 17th parallel following the Geneva Convention. Although a majority of artists remained in the North, a few notable ones like Nguyen Gia Tri and Ta Ty left for Saigon (renamed Ho Chi Minh City after the Reunification in 1976). The former became the director of the art school in Gia Dinh.

1948 The second national exhibition was organised in Xuan An village, Phu Tho province. There were about 100 paintings, including silks, wood engravings, and propaganda drawings. The Third Exhibition was organised in Chiem Hoa in celebration of the day of national resistance.

1950 Establishment of the School of Fine Arts in the Resistance Zone with To Ngoc Van installed as its director. Other prominent artists such as Nguyen Tu Nghiem and Tran Van Can served as teachers. Between 1950 and 1955, the school produced some 20 students. The new revolutionary art was to combat against decadent art by being scientific, national and popular, that is by abandoning religious, mythical and idealistic themes, focusing solely on the inspiration and needs of the revolution, and being appealing and educational to a majority of the people.

1951 Artist Ta Ty who did not leave Hanoi, held his first solo exhibition of his cubist-inspired paintings.

1952 Artist Bui Xuan Phai, citing poor health, returned to Hanoi.

1954 With the founding of the Republic of Vietnam in the south, the Gia Dinh Art School was renamed as Gia Dinh National School for Decorative Arts where Architecture was added to its curriculum. Later in the year, the Saigon College of Fine Arts was established where courses in painting, sculpture, life drawing and art history were offered. Both these institutions eventually merged into the Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts in 1981.

1955 Beginning of the campaign of "Hundred Flowers" as an experimental move by the North Vietnam regime. It led to an intellectual dissent that was stemmed out by 1958.

1956 President Ngo Dinh Diem of the Republic of Vietnam started a campaign against political dissents. The journal Song Tao (Creation) announced a literary revolution in the south with the declaration of the demise of Tu Luc Van Doan (Self-Reliance Literary Group) which was founded in 1932. The group had published important literary works during the 1930s.

1957 Start of the communist insurgency by Viet Cong, communist guerrillas, in the south.

1958 The Central Committee of CPI formally demanded a rectification of the mission of the arts and letters.

1960 Launch of the first Five-Year Plan (1960 to 1965) that introduced economic initiatives to encourage development.

1955 First National Art Exhibition in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam after the victory at Dien Bien Phu where *Meeting (Gap Nhau)* by Mai Van Hien (b.1923) was praised as the ideal painting that illustrated the idea of community and solidarity between the soldiers and the common people.

1956 Vigorous debates erupted in Hanoi on the role of the Artist in Society. In the first meeting of the writers and artists associations, members demanded for greater freedom of expression which went against what Ho Chi Minh had earlier laid down that art should serve a social purpose. Two art and literature journals Nhan Van (Humanism) and Giai Pham (Art Works) that carried articles supporting the argument were subsequently banned. The controversy continued into the following year.

The murals by Victor Tardieu at the University of Indochina were destroyed as they were seen as a reminder of Vietnam's colonial past.

1957 Founding of the school of fine arts in the University of Hue.

Founding of the Vietnam Association of Fine Arts in Hanoi, headed by Thai Ba Van. Its 108 members were obligated to hold one exhibition at local level yearly and another at national level every five years.

Creation of a new fine arts institution under the governance of the Ministry of Culture to provide tertiary education to painters and sculptors. The school occupied the former premises of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine. Tran Van Can was appointed as the Rector until his retirement in 1964.

1958 Founding of the Hanoi College of Industrial Arts where applied arts was the focus of its curriculum.

1962 An attempt was made to specify guidelines for artists in the production of artworks so that they portray a national character.

The First International Exhibition of Fine Arts of Saigon saw the participation of 21 countries. It was the first time that many artists in the south encountered abstract paintings in person. The second exhibition was planned for 1966 but was cancelled due to the increased intensity of the war.

1956 "Let a hundred flowers bloom" campaign in China briefly permitted writers and artists to speak out against the shortcomings of the Communist Party before they were suppressed.

1957 Malaysia was recognised as an independent nation.

1949 Founding of the People's Republic of China.

1955 First Indochina War or referred to by Vietnamese as the

1955-1975 The Second Indochina War or what is commonly known as The American War, and others as The Vietnam War.

Country was divided into North Vietnam (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam).

1948-1954

1955-1962

1963 Overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem who was killed in a coup led by Duong Van Minh. This brought political instability to the south.

1964 Gulf of Tonkin Incident where the naval forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam attacked two American destroyers. This prompted the first large-scale involvement of the United States in Vietnam. Start of US trade embargo for North Vietnam and was extended to the entire country in 1975 after Vietnam was unified. The embargo remained in place until it was lifted in 1994.

1969 Death of Ho Chi Minh.
First withdrawal of American troops.

1975 Fall of Saigon with the dramatic emergency evacuation carried out by the United States in the city.
United States imposed trade embargo which lasted until 1994.

1976 Re-Unification of North Vietnam and South Vietnam that led to the founding of Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Saigon which was the capital of the old republic was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.
Launch of the second Five-Year Plan aimed at integrating the north and south under a socialist industrialisation programme. Re-education of former soldiers and officials of the former South Vietnam regime as well as other undesirable remnants of the Neo-Colonist society took shape under the drive to construct the "new socialist man".
Start of the exodus of Vietnamese where the refugees were referred to as "Boat People" in reference to their mode of escape.

1978 Launch of the X2 campaign to crack down on foreign-aligned capitalists and national bourgeoisie.

1979 Vietnam invaded Cambodia and ousted the Pol Pot regime. China intervened but were pushed back by Vietnam.
The exodus of Vietnamese peaked and the "Boat People" phenomenon caused international concern.

1980 Implementation of the third Five-Year Plan (1980 to 1985) where more conservative economic goals were set. During this period, the reversal of the nationalisation programme began with the privatisation of the agriculture sector.

1986 Implementation of the fourth Five-Year Plan where the idea of a socialist-orientated market policy was introduced. Known as *Doi Moi* or "renovation", 1986 marked the start of the opening up of the country.

1963 Founding of National Museum of Fine Arts (Bao Tang My Thuat Viet Nam) initiated by Nguyen Do Cung (1912-1977) who was a student at L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine. The museum is governed by the Ministry of Culture.

1965 Establishment of a state-run art gallery in Hanoi where besides paintings, also sold souvenirs and handicrafts.

1966 Founding of the Saigon Society of Young Artists (Hoi Hoa Si Tre Saigon) that campaigned for developments in modern art. Members included Nguyen Trung and Trinh Cung.

1971 Nguyen Quan (b.1948) who started his tertiary education at the University of Merseburg, East Germany in 1969, graduated.

1975 Re-education of the southern artists.

1976 The Hanoi government decided to merge the two art institutions in Ho Chi Minh City, Gia Dinh National School for Decorative Arts and the Saigon College of Fine Arts into Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts College. Establishment of the Ho Chi Minh City branch of the Vietnam Association of Fine Arts.

1978 Creation of the department of art history and art theory at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts where Nguyen Quan was invited to teach. He taught there until 1989.

1984 The Vietnam Association of Fine Arts honoured artists Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Sang by organising solo exhibitions for them. Nguyen Tu Nghiem was honoured the following year.

1985 Nguyen Quan was elected into the executive committee of Vietnam Association of Fine Arts. He was also appointed as the Chief Editor of the Association's magazine My Thuat (Fine Arts) until his removal from all his official positions in 1989 for his unacceptable conduct by the cultural authorities.

1988 Passing away of Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Sang.

1989 The first privately-owned commercial art gallery, Tu Do Art Gallery opened in Ho Chi Minh City. Tu Do which means "liberty" was owned by woman painter Tran Thi Thu Ha.

1990 Establishment of Salon Natasha in Hanoi as the city's first private enterprise by Russian Natalia Kraevskaia who first came in 1983.

1963 Singapore merged with the Federation of Malaya to form Malaysia. Two years later in 1965, it declared its independence and became a republic.

1966 The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China was started by Mao Zedong on 16 May 1966. Its aim was to rid the country of its liberal bourgeoisie and to continue the class struggle. It was officially declared to have ended in 1969.

1976 Saloth Sar or Pol Pot became the Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea (now Cambodia). He fled to the jungle following the invasion by Vietnam in 1979.

only referred to by the Vietnamese,

Vietnam) and South Vietnam (Republic

1976-PRESENT Socialist Republic of Vietnam

1963-1976

1978-1990

List of artworks

Bui Huu Hung 1957, Hanoi

Ancient Stage I

1994

Lacquer on board

100 x 104 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Section: Transformation

Buu Chi 1948, Hue – 2002, Hue

Blind Man Playing the Monochord

1994

Oil on canvas

73 x 87 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Section: Individual

Buu Chi 1948, Hue – 2002, Hue

Searching for One Another

2001

Oil on paper

80 x 100 cm

Collection of Bill A. Manson

Section: Individual

Dang Xuan Hoa 1959, Nam Dinh

Human Objects No 1

1994

Oil on canvas

79 x 108.5 cm

Private collection

Section: Transformation

Dang Xuan Hoa 1959, Nam Dinh

Human Objects No 12

1992

Oil on canvas

80 x 100 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Section: Individual

Dao Minh Tri 1950, Hanoi

Pushing Away the War

1996

Lacquer on board

120 x 60 cm each, set of four panels

Collection of the artist

Section: Reminiscence

Dinh Thi Tham Poong 1970, Phong Tho
Born

1996

Watercolour on do paper

60 x 40 each

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Section: Land

Dinh Y Nhi 1967, Hanoi

1-2-3-4

1994

Gouache on paper

75 x 106 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Section: Individual

Do Duy Tuan 1954, Huong Dien

Combination

Mixed media on canvas

60 x 80.5 cm

Collection of Fine Arts Museum of Ho Chi Minh

City

Section: Land

Do Ky Huy 1964, Hue

Documentary on the *Cyclo Project* in Hue

2007

Courtesy of the artist

Section: Land

Do Son 1943, Bac Ninh Province

Heart of Mother

1994

Oil on canvas

95 x 134 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Section: Reminiscence

Do Thi Ninh 1947, Ninh Binh Province

Thay Pagoda

1993

Lacquer on board

90 x 110 cm

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Section: Land

Ha Manh Thang 1980, Thai Nguyen

The Artist

2007

Acrylic on paper

255 x 83 cm

Collection of Pho Hong Long

Section: Transformation

Ha Manh Thang 1980, Thai Nguyen
The Artist's Girlfriend
2007
Acrylic on paper
255 x 83 cm
Collection of Pho Hong Long
Section: Transformation

Ha Tri Hieu 1959, Hanoi
Day Singers
1994
Oil on canvas
130 x 140 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Reminiscence

Ha Tri Hieu 1959, Hanoi
Self-Portrait V
1997
Oil on canvas
42 x 32 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Individual

Ho Huu Thu 1940, Nghe An Province
Abstract II
1999
Lacquer on board
180 x 40 cm each, set of three panels
Collection of the artist
Section: Transformation

Hoang Duong Cam 1974, Hanoi
Bis Bis Elephant
2006
Video
Two-channel video
Collection of the artist
Section: Land

Hoang Duong Cam 1974, Hanoi
Untitled, Flower by...
2006
Digital print
70 x 93 cm
Collection of the artist
Section: Individual

Hoang Duong Cam 1974, Hanoi
Untitled, Tightrope
2006
Digital print
70 x 93 cm
Collection of the artist
Section: Individual

Hong Viet Dung 1962, Hanoi
Meditative Monk
Oil on canvas
155 x 155 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Land

Hua Thanh Binh 1957, Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City)
Traditional Family
1998
Oil on canvas
149 x 199.5 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
– Gift of Mark E. Tucker
Section: Reminiscence

Le Hong Thai 1966, Haiphong
Alone
1994
Lacquer on board
90 x 180 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Individual

Le Quang Ha 1963, Hanoi
The Dictator
Oil on canvas
250 x 300 cm
Collection of the artist
Section: Transformation

Le Quoc Viet 1972, Ha Tay
9 Levels of Lotus (Hands)
2001
Chinese ink on do paper
240 x 60 cm
Collection of the artist
Section: Transformation

Le Quoc Viet 1972, Ha Tay
9 Levels of Lotus (Feet)
2001
Chinese ink on *do* paper
240 x 60 cm
Collection of the artist
Section: Transformation

Le Thanh Son 1962, Hanoi
An Old Street in Hanoi
1998
Oil on canvas
93 x 103 cm
Collection of Toh Hock Ghim
Section: Land

Le Thiet Cuong 1962, Hanoi
The Changing Eye
1997
Oil on canvas
196 x 156 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Individual

Nguyen Bach Dan 1970, Hanoi
The Emptiness II
2006
Chinese ink on homemade *xuan* paper
180 x 97 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Transformation

Nguyen Minh Thanh 1971, Hanoi
Earth Blanket
2007
Natural pigments, gouache, watercolour and
Chinese ink on *do* paper
75 x 105 cm
Private collection
Section: Reminiscence

Nguyen Nghia Cuong 1973, Bac Ninh
Cuong's Smile
2005
Gouache on *do* paper
110 x 160 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Individual

Nguyen Nhu Y 1970, Hanoi
Sculpture Installation
1999
Wood
Variable
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Land

Nguyen Quan 1948, Vinh Phu
Human Face I
1993
Oil on canvas
80 x 75 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Transformation

Nguyen Quan 1948, Vinh Phu
Self-Portrait under the Moonlight
1992
Oil on canvas
80 x 75 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Individual

Nguyen Than 1948, Kim Son
Lunch
1994
Oil on canvas
162 x 130 cm each, set of two panels
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Reminiscence

Nguyen Thanh Son 1959, Pleiku Province
Innermost Feelings
2004
Oil on canvas
200 x 200 cm
Collection of Vietnam National Museum of Fine
Arts, Hanoi
Section: Land

Nguyen Thi Chau Giang 1975, Hanoi
To be Happier
2007
Ink and colour on silk
120 x 80 cm each, set of four paintings
Witness Collection
Section: Individual

Nguyen Trung 1940, Soc Trang Province
Meditation
Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
- Gift of Galerie Via Eight
Section: Transformation

Nguyen Trung 1940, Soc Trang Province
Untitled
1994
Oil and acrylic on canvas
130 x 130 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Land

Nguyen Trung 1940, Soc Trang Province
Mossy Rock
1993
Oil on canvas
130 x 130 cm
Collection of Vietnam National Museum of Fine
Arts, Hanoi
Section: Land

Nguyen Xuan Tiep 1956, Hanoi
The Return
1993
Oil on canvas
137 x 196 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Reminiscence

Nguyen Xuan Viet 1950, Nakhon Phanom Province,
Thailand
Dancing in the Dong Ky Village
1998
Lacquer on board
130 x 190 cm
Witness Collection
Section: Reminiscence

Pham An Hai 1967, Hanoi
Summer
1999
Oil on canvas
115 x 135 cm
Collection of the artist
Section: Land

Pham Luan 1954, Hanoi
Autumn In Hanoi
1995
Oil on canvas
76 x 91 cm
Collection of Toh Hock Ghim
Section: Reminiscence

Pham Luan 1954, Hanoi
Winter In Hanoi
1994
Gouache on paper
80 x 65 cm
Collection of Toh Hock Ghim
Section: Land

Pham Huy Thong 1981, Thai Binh
Petit Ange
2007
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 50 cm each, set of three panels
Witness Collection
Section: Transformation

Phan Cam Thuong 1957, Hanoi
The Village
2001
Watercolour on silk
80 x 200 cm
Collection of the artist
Section: Individual

Richard Streitmatter-Tran 1972, Bien Hoa
Missed Connections
2004
Film
Collection of the artist
Section: Reminiscence

Tran Hoang Co
Houses
Bronze
36 x 13 x 13 cm each, set of three sculptures
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Individual

Tran Luong 1960, Hanoi
Underwater
1994
Oil on canvas
90 x 160 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Reminiscence

Tran Luu Hau 1928, Ninh Binh
Cliff
1999
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 200 cm
Collection of Lim Theow Beng
Section: Land

Tran Trong Vu 1964, Hanoi
Rainwater Even Though Salty is not Speechless
c.2000
Oil on canvas
120 x 80 cm each, suite of three panels
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Land

Tran Trong Vu 1964, Hanoi
Untitled
1994
Oil on canvas
104 x 252 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Reminiscence

Tran Van Thao 1961, Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City)
One Sixth
1996
Oil on canvas
34 x 34 cm each, suite of six panels
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Transformation

Truong Tan 1963, Hanoi
Buddhist
1993
Lacquer on board
99 x 78 cm
Collection of Singapore Art Museum
Section: Individual

Truong Be 1942, Quang Tri
Tree of Life
2002
Lacquer on board
135 x 90 cm each, three panels
Collection of the artist
Section: Transformation

Vuong Van Thao 1969, Hanoi
Living Fossils
2006
Acrylic, stoneware, glaze
House: 25 x 25 x 30 cm
Pole: 35 x 10 x 10 cm
Suite of 36 pairs
Collection of the artist
Section: Reminiscence

Vu Dan Tan 1946, Hanoi
Beauty will Save the World
Recycled cardboard & Chinese ink
168 x 36 cm each, suite of 12 sculptures
Collection of the artist
Section: Transformation

Programmes

Post-Doi Moi: Vietnamese Art after 1990

12 May to 28 September 2008

Galleries 2.7 - 2.9, 3.7 - 3.8

Singapore Art Museum

Organiser: Singapore Art Museum
Presenting Sponsor: Credit Suisse
Supporters: Singapore Art Gallery Guide
Art Asia Pacific

This event is part of Vietnam Festival.

OTHER JOINT PROGRAMMES:

Symposium on Modern and Contemporary Vietnamese Art

16 – 18 May 2008

Singapore Art Museum

The three-day symposium sets out to explore the developments that have taken place in Vietnam through the presentations – from the rise of modern art from the French Colonial period to the experimental art movement in present-day Vietnam – examining the differences in the developments that have taken place in the north and the south. Speakers are from the United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, Japan, Vietnam and Singapore.

Kết Nối: Vietnam-Singapore Performance Art Event

Workshop: 27 May – 5 June 2008

Event: 6 – 8 June 2008

Dialogue: 9 June 2008

Singapore Art Museum & Singapore Management University

[Venue sponsor: Singapore Management University]

Kết Nối (meaning, to connect) is focused on art and cultural exchange between young contemporary artists from Singapore and Vietnam. The process is set up whereby five selected artists from each of the country will live and interact with each other for a period of 10 days with three experienced artists and curators as moderators. Post-Museum will provide the studio/working space for these 13 artists to conduct workshops during this period.

Kết Nối culminated in a three-day performance art festival that took place in SAM and SMU, and a one-day closed-door dialogue between the artists and moderators regarding the residency, interaction and collaboration.

An Afternoon of Vietnamese Art Connoisseurship

19 July 2008

Singapore Art Museum

Our former Ambassador to Vietnam, Mr Toh Hock Ghim played an important role in the development of the Vietnam art market during his tenure there in the early 1990s. He gave strong support to budding artists such as Nguyen Thanh Son and Pham Luan whose works are now much sought after by collectors. He also rendered crucial assistance in securing the loans of very important paintings for the Singapore Art Museum inaugural exhibition in 1996.

Mr Toh is joined in conversation with Mr Michael Koh, Chief Executive Officer of the National Heritage Board who has a keen interest in Vietnamese art, and Ms Joyce Fan, Curator, Singapore Art Museum. Together, they shared their experiences in art collecting as well as insights into the Hanoi art scene in the 1980s and 1990s.

Biographies of Artists

Bui Huu Hung (1957, Hanoi)

Hung attempted his first lacquer painting while studying graphics at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts. After graduating in 1975, he began studying lacquer painting seriously at traditional lacquer workshops. He considered Bui Tuan Thanh (1941, Hanoi), a highly regarded lacquer artist, his most influential teacher. As a consequence, Hung came to be dubbed an "old-fashioned lacquerer" where he continues till today, to prepare his own lacquer which he purchases from a village 50 kilometres away from Hanoi. It is believed that the son trees grown there produce the best resin in Vietnam. His virtuosity in the medium can be seen in his ability to achieve greater depth and surface richness that is only possible with a deep appreciation and understanding of the medium.

In 1986, Hung set up his own lacquer studio, Nha San Studio and a decade later, he assumed the directorship of both the Studio and the Lacquer Artist's Workshop in Hanoi. He is a member of the Fine Arts Association and the International Association of the Lacquer Painters. [JF&PL]

Buu Chi (1948, Hue – 2002, Hue)

A fifth generation descendant of the Nguyen Emperor Minh Mang (1820-1840), Buu Chi seldom drew attention to his royal lineage. Instead, strongly affected by the destruction and suffering caused by war, he became an activist and student leader in the peace movement in Hue. He joined the movement while studying Law at the University of Hue where he graduated in 1971. A year later, he was arrested by the South Vietnamese government for his involvement in anti-war and anti-government campaigns and was only released in 1975 after the south came under the control of North Vietnam.

A self-taught artist, Buu Chi's early works in ink and brush were political in nature and social commentaries, where he aimed to draw attention to the horrors of war and violence. Primarily a humanist, Buu Chi attempted to convey the harsh realities of life in his paintings where his interest in political writings, Eastern philosophy and Buddhism coupled with his exposure through books to Western modern movements such as cubism, surrealism and symbolism, led to the surrealist and symbolic paintings that he came to be known for. [JF]

Dang Xuan Hoa (1959, Nam Dinh)

Hoa first participated in a group exhibition Young Painters in 1985, two years after he graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts. In 1987, he was selected as one of 16 young artists for an exhibition at the Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts, Hanoi. Art Critic and writer Duong Tuong regarded him as a talented artist and included him in the Gang of Five.

Hoa abandoned an impressionist style of painting for a more expressionist and naïve approach. He regarded the old masters – Bui Xuan Phai, Nguyen Tu Nghiem and Nguyen Gia Tri – as well as his teacher Tran Luu Hau, as his sources of inspiration. Hoa considers their art to embody the Vietnamese spirit that he finds critical in Vietnamese modern and contemporary art. Since the early 1990s, he started to focus his attention on people around him and objects from his everyday life, giving rise to the important Human Objects series where its pictorial structure has come to characterise his artistic approach. [JF]

Dao Minh Tri (1950, Hanoi)

A graduate of the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1976, Tri was a Realist artist. Currently, he is well-known for his abstract lacquer paintings where the Fish motif is his signature. He fondly recalls the Tet (Vietnamese New Year) tradition of hanging paintings of fish on the wall as a symbol of happiness and prosperity. He has come to regard the Fish as inspiration for his art.

Tri moved to the South when he took the post of a lecturer at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts in 1976. He retired in 1993 and is currently Chairman of the Fine Arts Association of Ho Chi Minh City. [JF&PL]

Dinh Y Nhi (1967, Hanoi)

A graduate of the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Nhi is the daughter of the much-decorated painter Dinh Trong Khang (1935, Ha Nam Ninh). Her father was her first art teacher, giving her art lessons before she was nine years old. Nhi realised from an early age that hers was a homeland torn by war and enslaved several times over. As such, painting flowers and beautiful landscapes seem irrelevant to her and she chooses instead to give expression to what she has experienced together with her family and country in these difficult times. Favouring simplicity of expression, her figures are cartoon-like stick figures, and her palette is restricted to black, white and shades of grey. Her minimalist rendition, together with the grid-like placement of individual portraits within each painting, suggests a commonality of experience. Yet, each face has been endowed with subtle variations, hinting at the private history of each individual. [TSL]

Dinh Thi Tham Poong (1970, Phong Tho)

Of mixed ethnicity, Muong and Thai, Poong grew up in the Lai Chau Province located in the north-eastern part of the country bordering China. Poong came from an artistic family; her mother was a member of the Lai Chau Song and Dance Ensemble while her father was a cultural militant in Son Lai. As a child, she often accompanied her mother to the hillside where the family supplemented their income through growing crops in small fields. She

recalled the panoramic view that the hills offered that later came to influence the imagery used in her art.

At an early age, Poong showed keen interest in the arts. With her family's support, she studied at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts and graduated in 1993. She cited the senior sculptor Dao Chau Hai (b.1954) as her first teacher who impressed upon her the importance of self-expression. Though trained in sculpture, she found the painting genre to be a more suitable medium of expression. Her paintings capture the duality of the human existence of being animal and vegetal, co-existing in a constant struggle for survival. [JF]

Do Duy Tuan (1954, Thua Thien)

Tuan graduated from the National School of Fine Arts, Hue in 1974 and participated in many art activities in Hue and Danang before 1975. Due to his family obligations, he stopped painting and only resumed in 1994. Since then, he has been regarded as a talented artist and has received recognition locally and abroad. [JF]

Do Ky Huy (1964, Vietnam)

A graduate of Hue University in central Vietnam, and later The University of New South Wales, Australia, Huy has exhibited in Vietnam as well as Australia. In recent years, he has undertaken a number of art projects involving the local community, such as Paintings onto the Street (2004) and Drying (2007). Like his Cyclo Art Project, Huy's initiatives are aimed at bringing art and aesthetics to a section of society that would otherwise have little or no contact with it. His projects take into careful consideration, the social and cultural contexts of the groups of people he is working with, and aim to integrate the daily activities and practices of the local community into the eventual artistic product. Huy's projects have received support and funding from the Government in recognition of his contribution to the preservation of heritage and culture. [TSL]

Do Son (1943, Bac Ninh Province)

Prior to his graduation from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1978, Son served in the military in 1965 and eventually became an artist for the Liberation Army Magazine from 1968 to 1970 and later for the Daily People's Army Newspaper in the early 1970s. As expected, his early works were focused on portraits of soldiers and places he was assigned to. Since the 1990s, Son has come to be known for his lyrical paintings of a peaceful world. [JF]

Do Thi Ninh (1947, Ninh Binh Province)

Following her graduation from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1973, Ninh was accepted

as a member of the Association of Fine Arts and worked full time as a state painter until the market reforms in 1986. The stipend provided by the job allowed her, as a single woman, the independence and freedom to paint even though what she painted was restricted to workers, soldiers and peasants. Following the *Doi Moi* reformation, she continues to paint the people around her and her palette has taken a more colourful direction. She regards her use of strong colours as "imaginary". She is recognised as an accomplished silk and lacquer painter. [JF]

Ha Manh Thang (1980, Thai Nguyen)

Thang graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, and now lives and works in Hanoi. He has exhibited alongside other contemporary up-and-coming artists in galleries as well as commercial spaces. His Pop Art-flavoured paintings are in high demand both at home in Vietnam as well as in overseas corporate collections. Collectors and critics alike laud his playful commentary on the impact of contemporary mass culture on traditional values and heritage. [TSL]

Ha Tri Hieu (1959, Hanoi)

One of the painters in the Gang of Five, Hieu is a graduate of the Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts in 1983. At an early age, he took painting lessons from pioneer artist Pham Viet Song (1917, Nam Dinh Province – 2005, Hanoi) where he came to befriend Hong Viet Dung and Dang Xuan Hoa. The three friends together with Tran Luong and Pham Quang Vinh are known as the Gang of Five and exhibited regularly until the mid-1990s. Hieu strongly admires the works of Master painter Nguyen Tu Nghiem (1922, Nghe An) who advocated a tradition-inspired focus in contemporary expression, it is no wonder that critic and writer Duong Tuong considers him to be "the most rustic-minded" among the five artists. The subjects that can be found in Hieu's paintings are "the cow, bull, water buffalo, bird fish and village choir." [JF]

Ho Huu Thu (1940, Nghe An Province)

After graduating from Gia Dinh National College of Fine Arts (now, Ho Chi Minh University of Fine Arts) in 1964, Thu was later made a professor at the school. He is a member of the Fine Art Association of Ho Chi Minh City, and exhibited in Vietnam and overseas (Singapore, United States, France, Japan). Working in both objective and abstract styles, Thu often pushes the boundaries of lacquer and is one of the pioneers in this field. With a Buddhist outlook, the artist seeks the truth in his painting which finds expression in spontaneity and abstraction. For Thu, "Abstract painting is a reality which veils everyone's mind, when all the false thoughts of the painters and appreciation come to an end." [PL]

Hoang Duong Cam (1974, Hanoi)

A graduate of the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Cam moved to live and work in Ho Chi Minh City to embrace the "fresh and new". Cam works across media, from painting to photography, to installation and interactive projects. He is a member of MOGAS Station, a Vietnam-based artist's collective dedicated to the presentation and promotion of contemporary art. He is also the editor of A.Art magazine on contemporary art and culture.

Fat-Free Museum is a series of digital photographs taken by Cam during his 2005 trip to New York City. This playful and provocative body of work exemplifies the avant-garde art pursued by Vietnamese artists in the wake of the country's *Doi Moi* liberalisation policy. An engaging blend of wit and humour, alongside a canny understanding of the conventions and institutions of art in both the West and the East, Fat Free Museum has caught the attention of critics and champions of contemporary Vietnamese art. Amongst them is Quynh Pham, owner of the progressive art space Galerie Quynh, who has predicted international acclaim and success for Hoang's fresh new work. [TSL]

Hong Viet Dung (1962, Hanoi)

As his father was a playwright for drama and Cheo theatre (Vietnamese traditional theatre), Dung grew up in an artistic and intellectual environment. His home was often a meeting place for writers and actors as part of an intellectual network. From young, he took paintings lessons from pioneer artist Pham Viet Song (1917, Nam Dinh Province – 2005, Hanoi) and came to be acquainted with Ha Tri Hieu and Dang Xuan Hoa in the class. Later when he was enrolled in the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, he met Tran Luong and Pham Quang Vinh. After graduating in 1984, he got together with his four friends to exhibit regularly in each other's homes and they were eventually dubbed as Hanoi's Gang of Five by art critic and writer Duong Tuong despite their varied styles. [JF]

Hua Thanh Binh (1957, Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City)

Binh was trained in the Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts and graduated in 1987. Primarily an oil painter, he is well-known for his figurative works that incorporate traditional motifs, drawing attention to the preservation of past customs and familial ties. [JF]

Le Hong Thai (1966, Haiphong)

Thai graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1991 and for a brief period, worked at the Nha Son Studio. His early works were considerably hard-edged abstract where he used a geometric composition of forms and shapes. His minimalist paintings are imbued with painterly qualities and subtleties as a result of a careful and deliberated build-

up of colours in the lacquer medium. His lacquer paintings take on a spiritual dimension where he searches for an emotional tie through these layers of colours and abstract imagery. Thai has, however in his recent works, reverted to figuration through which he uses painting as a platform for social commentary. Despite his changed focus, his masterful and innovative blending of the age-old technique with contemporary ideas has led him to be highly regarded for his contemporary paintings. [JF]

Le Quang Ha (1963, Hanoi)

From an early age, Ha was exposed to art and was enrolled at the Young Pioneers Club in 1970. He was a solitary figure and unlike most of his peers, he chose to study in Ho Chi Minh City in the mid-1980s. He eventually finished his studies at the Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts in 1992.

Through his brutal and confrontational paintings, Ha reflects his observations and views of the socio-economic changes that Vietnam is undergoing in recent years. While he desires to destabilise the viewer with his shocking imagery, he also seeks to express his deep interest in humanity. [JF&PL]

Le Quoc Viet (1972, Ha Tay)

Le Quoc Viet is well-known for his blackened lacquered teeth that was once regarded as a sign of beauty and refinement before the practice was banned by the French colonial government. As in his appearance, Viet has a keen interest in classical art since he was a child, studying Chinese calligraphy in a pagoda in Thanh Hoa Province. He is one of the rare individuals in present-day Vietnam who is able to read and write in Nom, the ancient Vietnamese writing that originated from the Han script. Viet was also trained by the temple priests in the ancient art of block carving and printing techniques that he continues to apply in his art practice. He later embarked on further studies at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, graduating in 1996. He is currently researching on the ancient arts of Vietnam at the Hanoi Fine Arts Institute and was one of the writers in an important publication Ancient Graphic Arts of Vietnam that he wrote together with Phan Cam Thuong and Cung Khac Luoc. [JF]

Le Thanh Son (1962, Hanoi)

Son graduated from the Hanoi University of Drama and Cinematography in 1986. Known for his impressionistic paintings, he draws from his theatre and cinematic background in his artistic approach. Inspired by the city of Hanoi and its surroundings, he sets out to paint scenes with a strong emphasis on light and colours in an attempt at preserving the memories of the ancient streets and buildings. [JF]

Le Thiet Cuong (1962, Hanoi)

Cuong is from a highly educated and artistic family where at an early age, he was exposed to both classical art and Western culture. His father, Le Nguyen was a renowned scriptwriter, playwright and poet while his mother, Do Phuong Thao was a famous cinematographer. It is not surprising that Cuong enrolled in the Vietnam State Film College where he graduated in 1990 with a degree in set design and animation. He also started painting seriously that year.

Cuong admired both Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso and had a deep interest in the literature works of James Joyce and Jean-Paul Sartre. These influences can be observed in his early frenzied and Impressionists paintings. He became a staunch believer in Tay Tang Buddhism (a Tibetan sect) and started painting seriously. The teachings have a profound influence in his art. His early childhood in Binh Da Village where the family sought shelter from the American bombing in Hanoi and the short stint in military service during the early 1980s exposed him to the rural farming community. His keen observation of everyday life during these episodes in his life also greatly contributed to his imagery and depictions in his painting. Cuong eventually came to be known for his minimalist paintings and in contrast to his early works, they are deemed meditative due to their simplicity in representation and the strong but limited colour palette. [JF]

Nguyen Bach Dan (1970, Hanoi)

Primarily an ink painter, Dan is well known for her monochromatic landscapes that she executes in large scale., she has adapted the traditionally male-dominated medium to suit her lyrical and romanticised expressions. Her mysterious landscapes, characterised by dense brushstrokes, seem to draw the viewers into spaces that she has created.

Dan's experimentation in the ink medium started while she was studying in the Hanoi University of Fine Arts. After she graduated in 1993, she worked as a graphic designer for New Fashion magazine for five years. Currently, she is a graphic designer for a children's magazine and continues to paint scenes of forests with thick foliage. [JF]

Nguyen Minh Thanh (1971, Hanoi)

While studying at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Thanh began creating a series of self-portraits in the attempt to reconcile the tension between traditions and the increasingly contested social boundaries that resulted from the developments and progress made in economic advancement. This former student of artist Truong Tan, upon graduation in 1996, proceeded to breakaway from his classical art training by creating drawings of his mother on cotton banners which were then hanged as an installation. This attempt at creating an art installation in Vietnam was then novel and avant garde, and propelled Thanh to

prominence as an emerging young artist. Since then, he has continued to successfully explore, through drawings of himself and his mother, familial relationships within the larger social, philosophical and psychological spheres. [JF]

Nguyen Nghia Cuong (1973, Bac Ninh)

Born and raised in Thuan Thanh district, a traditional centre of Vietnamese art and culture, and coming from a family of several classical painters, Cuong breaks the mould with his refreshing and contemporary style of art. A graduate of the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Cuong's art – executed with the simplest of materials such as gouache and newsprint – presents a series of vignettes that references both his inner and outer world. His work veers from exuberance and glee to wrenching sadness, exploring the full range of human emotions. Sometimes personal anecdote and sometimes social commentary, Cuong's art never loses its wry humour and sense of playfulness. [TSL]

Nguyen Nhu Y (1970, Hanoi)

Formerly a student of sculpture at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Y suffered a mental breakdown at the end of his first year of study. Since then, he has drifted in and out of the fringes of society, occasionally reappearing in art circles to sell his works. Y sculpts wood intuitively and with the fervour of a man possessed; many of Vietnam's artistic elite admire him for his nomadic and simple existence, while gallery owners speak highly of his obvious talent for carving and sculpting wood, and the fascinating works that come out of his compulsive art-making. [TSL]

Nguyen Quan (1948, Vinh Phu)

An art historian, critic and painter, Quan is a son of an army general and comes from a family of Confucian scholars. He grew up in Hai Phong, and when the family moved to Hanoi, he took drawing lessons from pioneer artist Nam Son (1890-1973), a graduate from the first class at the Ecole des Beaux Arts d Indochine.

Nguyen Quan had the privilege to study abroad and between 1965 and 1971 at the University of Merseburg, East Germany, where he studied mathematics and physics. This was an important period for him as he used this opportunity to visit the art collections in Europe as well as to learn about art history. When the Hanoi University of Fine Arts created a department of art theory and art history in 1978, he was invited to be a lecturer where he taught until 1984. The following year, he was elected into the executive committee of the Fine Arts Association and for the next four years, he was the chief editor of the association's magazine *My Thuat* (Fine Arts). He assumed an important role during the early years of the *Doi Moi* period (late 1980s) in influencing the development of modern and contemporary

art in Vietnam through the introduction of international art via articles in the magazine as well as transforming it into a forum for ideas about art practices and production.

As a painter, his early works were executed in the realist style but while studying in East Germany, he became interested in Surrealism. Adopting the approach into his practice, he began painting semi-abstract and symbolic works and came to be well-known for his Altar series where dismembered bodies are juxtaposed with everyday objects. [JF]

Nguyen Than (1948, Ha Nam Ninh)

In 1954 at the age of six, Nguyen Than and his family emigrated to the South. He is largely self-taught although he took some art courses at the Gia Dinh National School for Decorative Arts. As he was a soldier in the South Vietnam army and a Catholic, he was not permitted employment under the government nor in the factories and cultural organisations after the reunification of Vietnam. Since he could not be a member of the Fine Arts Association, he was unable to sell his paintings. In order to support his family, he became a cyclo-rider for 12 years. He resumed painting in 1981 secretly and only after the implementation of the *Doi Moi* policies did he begin to sell his works openly. He was one of the artists in the important 1991 exhibition *Uncorked Soul* at the Plum Blossoms Gallery in Hong Kong. [JF]

Nguyen Thanh Son (1959, Pleiku Province)

Son graduated from Hue College of Fine Arts in 1987 and held his first solo exhibition in 1991 in Ho Chi Minh City. Coming from the Western highlands, he takes inspiration from village life for his paintings. Transforming them with a personal vision, his works are endowed with a kind of spirituality that is found in the beliefs and traditions of the land and its inhabitants, where the living and the dead lead contiguous and intermingled lives in his canvases. [JF]

Nguyen Thi Chau Giang (1975, Hanoi)

Although Chau Giang is born in Hanoi, she grew up in the South and therefore she is not particularly burdened by the traditions and customs of the North. Nevertheless she understands the sacrifices that her parents and grandparents had to face, especially during the war years. She regards her paintings as an outlet of expressing her inner feelings and dubbed as "Frieda Kahlo of Vietnam", her art reveals the anxieties of womanhood – as a daughter, wife and mother.

Chau Giang graduated from Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts in 1998 in oil painting, and is well-known for her self-portraits as well as elderly women in traditional

clothes. She began experimenting with silk painting recently and has successfully produced a series of paintings in the medium. [JF]

Nguyen Trung (1940, Soc Trang Province)

Trung received his artistic training from Gia Dinh National College of Fine Arts from where he graduated in 1962. He was one of the founding members of Society of Young Artists of Saigon that was established in 1966. One of the pioneer artists of abstraction in Vietnam, the artist found inspiration in Chinese ink drawing and calligraphy. Among the artists he admires are French artists Pierre Soulages and Georges Mathieu, Japanese artist Sugai and China-born artist Zao Wouki; all of these artists work largely in abstraction with an interest in calligraphy.

While in France from 1990 to 1991, Trung developed a new form of "organic" abstraction from his observations of the winter landscape. With his affinity for Buddhism, Trung's essential virtue is an innermost will of freedom that he expresses through his abstract paintings, and especially the act of painting itself. [PL]

Nguyen Xuan Tiep (1956, Hanoi)

Tiep graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts and formerly worked as a conservator at the Vietnam National Museum of Hanoi. The themes of Tiep's work revolve around the countryside, family, memory and the spiritual. He draws inspiration from traditional Vietnamese culture, in particular its myths and legends. The pagoda and floating 'fairy' heads are recurrent motifs in his works, which often take on a dream-like quality. His style is in a way typical of the Northern Vietnamese artists, who choose to assert and affirm their identity and history through a return to traditional and indigenous art forms. A narrative approach is also favoured in their works. [TSL]

Nguyen Xuan Viet (1950, Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand)

Viet's parents migrated to Thailand in 1946 when France reoccupied Vietnam. Viet spent his childhood in Thailand and when his family returned to Vietnam in 1963, they lived in Hai Phong in North Vietnam. In 1966 Viet studied at the Hanoi Fine Art School which was then located in Bac Giang Province, a mountainous region near the China border. He moved to the South in 1975 after the collapse of South Vietnam. He then resigned from the Army and enrolled in the Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts. It was in that same year, Viet met Nguyen Gia Trí (1908, Ha Tay Province 1993, Ho Chi Minh City) and became his student. [PL]

Pham An Hai (1967, Hanoi)

Although his parents were office workers, Hai's interest in art started at an early age. He recalled that as a six year old, he would spend hours creating clay figures and objects for his imaginary world. He has never lost that interest in the city as reflected in his prolific output of abstract cityscapes.

Hai graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1995 and received his Masters in 2006. He started his artistic career as an expressionist painter until in 1998, he almost lost his sight in a tragic accident. He continues to paint despite his adversity and made a breakthrough with Abstraction in 1999. Since then, he has been painting in the abstract mode with his favourite subjects being the changing cityscape of Hanoi. [JF&PL]

Pham Huy Thong (1981, Thai Binh)

Thong graduated from Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts in 2004. Since then, he supports his art practice as an illustrator for children's books, a freelance graphic artist as well as an art teacher at the Hanoi Architecture University. He is currently studying for his Masters in Fine Art at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts. [JF]

Pham Luan (1954, Hanoi)

Primarily a landscape painter in oil and gouache, Luan is a self-taught artist. While serving military service in the 1970s and 1980s, he started sketching the places where he was assigned for duty. Since then, he continues to make sketches everyday, now mostly of the city of Hanoi. As a result of this consistency, he has documented the changes that took place since the implementation of *Doi Moi* policies. However in the paintings that he produced, the realism in those sketches gives way to his impressionist views of the places he depicts. His interest in light and shadow in these paintings are apparent and he became well-known for his cityscapes of Hanoi that he continues to capture faithfully till the present. [JF]

Phan Cam Thuong (1957, Hanoi)

As a child, Thuong studied calligraphy and painting from his father and he grew up with a keen interest in classical fine arts and literature. After a short stint in the military, Thuong enrolled in the Hanoi University of Fine Arts where he graduated in 1984 in history and theory of art. Since then until 1992, he taught in the department and has co-authored a number of publications as well as essays on Vietnamese art.

Thuong's art centres on life in the rural villages. Having spent much of his childhood in the countryside to avoid the bombing in Hanoi, he developed a love for the village's way of

life as well as traditions and customs. In particular, he is interested in the topics of predestined human relationships and death. He regards these two areas as fundamental to life where fate and destiny play a major role in bringing people together or separating them. On death, he takes an Asian view that the passing of a person is but a beginning of another existence. [JF]

Richard Streitmatter-Tran (1972, Bien Hoa)

Rich is a graduate of the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, and is currently based in Ho Chi Minh City. He has exhibited widely, including at the Venice Biennale, the Singapore Biennale and the Gwangju Biennale. He is actively involved in collectives promoting and presenting contemporary art. In 2000 he established the E-identity group in Boston, an online community of designers, artists, performers and writers. The group facilitates online collaboration between cultural producers worldwide. Rich is also a founding member of MOGAS Station, a group of international artists and architects based in Ho Chi Minh City. *Missed Connections* (2005) was produced together with a group of artist-friends, and screened in Vermont, New York, Nantes in France and at the 3rd Experimental Film Festival in Bangkok, Thailand. In addition to his art projects, Rich writes for several publications, and is the Ho Chi Minh City editor for *Contemporary* magazine. Currently a lecturer at RMIT Vietnam, his research focuses on media and cultural production in Southeast Asia.

[TSL]

Tran Hoang Co

Co belongs to the third generation of sculptors in Vietnam. In the wake of the country's liberalisation, sculptors such as Co sought to realise their individual expression and vision in original forms. His work is highly personal, and draws freely upon sources of inspiration ranging from religious surrealism to expressive romanticism. [TSL]

Tran Luong (1960, Hanoi)

Graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1983, Luong was one of the Gang of Five, a group of young artists who came together to exhibit and show their work in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His paintings are derived from his childhood experiences during the war time where evacuations from the city of Hanoi were frequent to avoid the American bombings. His memories of growing up in the rural areas are reflected in his works where his fondness for the ponds and the life that can be found in the waters, can be seen. For a period of time in the late 1990s, he stopped painting in reaction to the commercialisation of art. Instead, he ventured into the more contemporary media of installation and performance art where he has since achieved a highly influential position

in the art community. He was the founder and artistic director the Hanoi's Contemporary Art Centre which is now defunct but nevertheless he continues to advise in numerous international contemporary art projects. He was invited by the Singapore Art Museum to be the artist-curator and moderator together with Singapore artists Lee Wen and Jason Lim, for Ket Noi: Vietnam-Singapore Performance Art Exchange,,a 14-day workshop and performance art event in June 2008. [JF]

Tran Luu Hau (1928, Ninh Binh)

Hau started his art education at the Resistance Fine Arts School in Viet Bac from 1949–1953 before going to the V. Surikov Moscow State Academy Art Institute, a division of the USSR Academy of Arts, in 1956. He completed his studies in 1962 and returned to Hanoi and taught at the then Hanoi College of Fine Arts (now, Hanoi University of Fine Arts) until his retirement in 1989. Between 1983 and 1994, he was made an executive committee member of the Fine Arts Association Vietnam and assumed Chairmanship for two tenures. He began experimenting in abstraction in the 1960s and since the transformation of the Vietnamese economy, he has been a strong advocator of abstract expressionism, and is known for his expressionist renditions of still-life paintings and landscapes. [JF]

Tran Trong Vu (1964, Hanoi)

Son of poet and novelist Tran Dan (1926, Nam Dinh – 1997, Hanoi) who is well-known for his radical works, Vu is a visual poet who chooses his images and colours with care. He says, "I paint my life, my town, my things. They are concrete. They dwell permanently in my head. And they leave this dwelling in order to enter another system, a private life filled with humanity." Vu graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1987 and worked as a drawing teacher at the University from 1987 to 1989. He currently lives in France following his studies at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Paris. [PL]

Tran Van Thao (1961, Ho Chi Minh City)

A student of Nguyen Trung, Thao graduated from Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts in 1986. Primarily an abstract painter, he derives his inspiration from his own emotions and experiences. [PL]

Truong Be (1942, Quang Tri)

A graduate of the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1974, Be furthered his studies at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest, Hungary between 1983 and 1986. When he returned to Vietnam, he was assigned to teach at the Hue University by the Government and was made the Vice-Dean in 1988. He continued teaching there until his retirement in 2002.

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Be's first exposure to Western art was through books that he read while studying in Hanoi. During his first trip to Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in the early 1980s, he was acquainted with the abstract works of Vietnamese artist Ta Ty (1920 – 2004) who was known for his experimentations with Cubism. While studying in Hungary, Be continued with his research in abstraction. Encouraged by the greater freedom of expression in the immediate *Doi Moi* period, he exhibited his works in a group exhibition in the Hanoi Fine Arts Association in 1988. He continues to work in the abstract mode. [JF]

Truong Tan (1963, Hanoi)

Known as the Vietnamese artist who openly declares his sexual orientation as well as the first to combine text in his paintings, Tan was regarded as the foremost contemporary artist during the 1990s. Working in the lacquer, paper and mixed media, Tan radically challenges the conservative Vietnamese aesthetics and traditions with his imagery and profanities. Graduated from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1989, he was a lecturer at in the University until 1998 when he left for Paris in search of greater freedom of expression and artistic engagements. He currently resides in France and also continues to work in Hanoi. [JF]

Vu Dan Tan (1946, Hanoi)

A self-taught artist, Tan works with found objects and transforms these into his whimsical and fantastical creations. His choice of medium may partly be explained by the scarcity of art materials in post-war Vietnam. In addition, the ready availability of scrap materials enables him to give free rein to his creativity without impediments of cost. As his prodigious output testifies, he is constantly experimenting and reworking his materials. His imaginative artworks are in several public collections, including the Queensland Art Gallery of Brisbane Australia, and the World Bank in Washington, USA. [TSL]

Vuong Van Thao (1969, Hanoi)

A graduate of Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Thao works primarily as a painter and installation artist. *Living Fossils* exhibited in the exhibition was part of a photo-installation for an exhibition entitled *Hanoi With 5000 Hoan Kiem Lakes*. This exhibition stemmed from the efforts of the P-art group comprising young contemporary artists from Vietnam, who undertook a project to investigate urban planning and change, from the perspective of the younger generation of Hanoi residents. [TSL]

trước mưa có mặt





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